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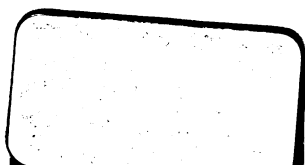
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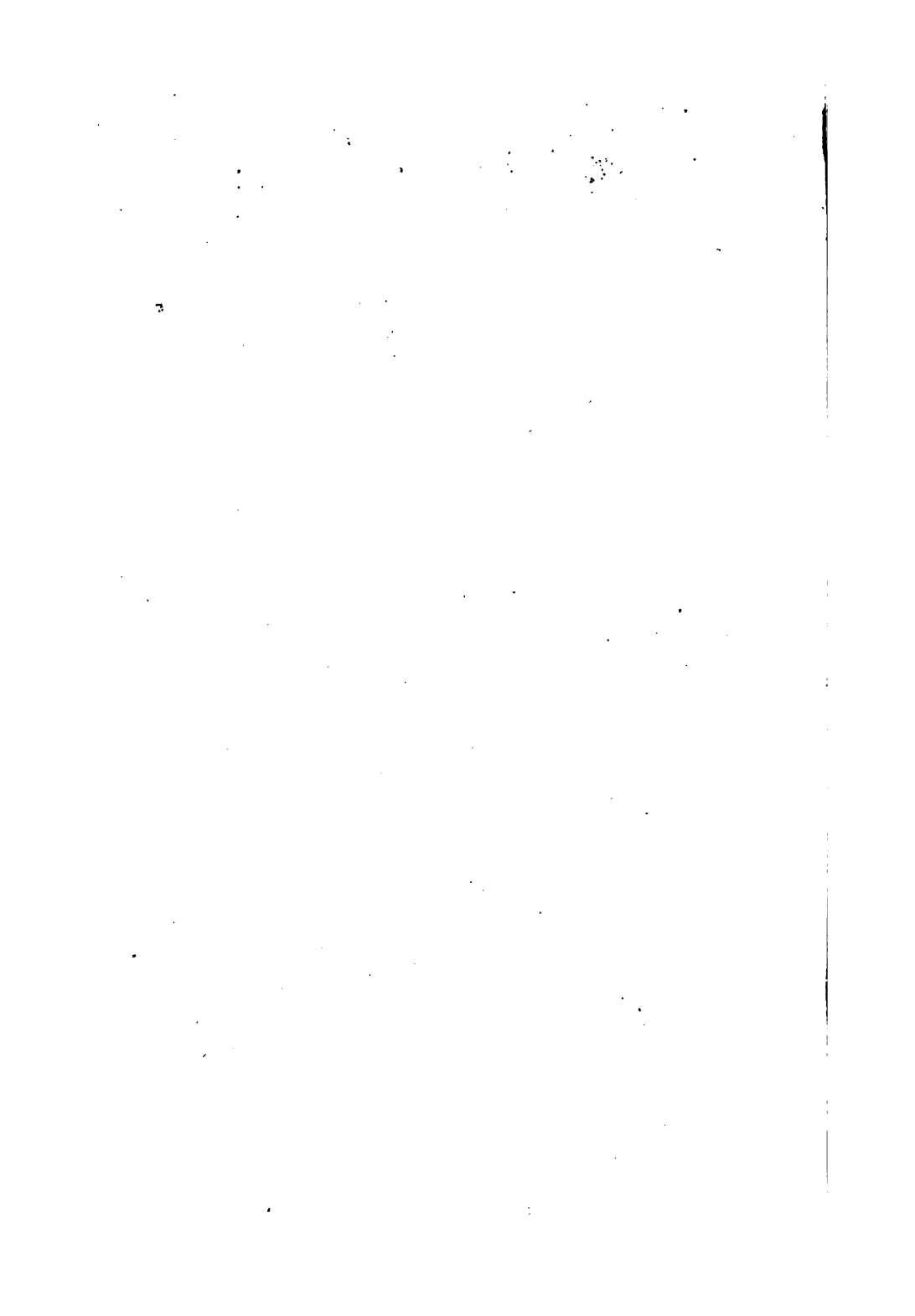
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HOMILIES
ON THE
SERMON ON THE MOUNT.



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HOMILIES
ON THE
SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

BY THE
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OXFORD and LONDON:
JAMES PARKER AND CO.
1867.

100. g. 190.



PREFACE.

THE author of the following discourses, by prefixing to them the somewhat antiquated name of Homilies, intends to convey the notion of their simplicity and familiarity, and of their adaptation to popular use, and, at the same time, to intimate the plan upon which they are composed, which is that observed by the ancient Fathers in those of their works which bear the same title.

The ancient Homily differed from the modern sermon in this, that it was a discourse, not upon a single text, which merely served as a motto to it, but upon a larger portion of Scripture, a paragraph complete in itself. The meaning of the successive passages was explained when necessary, the doctrines or precepts contained in them brought prominently forward, the lessons, moral and religious, to be learnt from them, pressed upon the attention; and exposition was followed by exhortation; that whilst the understanding was enlightened by the knowledge of divine truth, the will might be moved to obedience.

This, surely, was a profitable mode of instruction, and it had the advantage of being popular. Now, to aim at popularity for its own sake is contemptible, and, in a Christian, something worse; but to be popular in order to be useful to the many is both a laudable and a desirable object. It is not, however, meant that the preacher should be popular, but his teaching; and this is effected by the Homily, which meets that fondness of the people for the words of Scripture itself, which may be called a spiritual instinct, and which is surely to be indulged. At the same time, the hearer is not left to interpret the Scriptures for himself. He receives an interpretation with them, and the instruction to be derived from them is plainly drawn out for him.

This method, the author conceives, may be advantageously pursued in the present day. The Epistles and Gospels of our Church are admirable subjects for Homilies of this sort. Of the former it may be said that they require such an exposition, especially those selected from the Epistle to the Galatians, which can hardly be understood from the bare text, and without such an accompaniment are but a dead letter.

The good effects attributed to "the foolishness

of preaching" shew it to be one of the most important of the means of grace, and prove both the sin and the danger of neglecting it. To nothing, perhaps, is the increase of dissent in particular places more to be imputed than to this neglect. When "the hungry sheep look up and are not fed," it is no wonder if they are tempted to stray from the fold. By every feeling of attachment, therefore, to the Church of which we are ministers, we are urged to "take heed to the doctrine." And if the demand for Scriptural preaching cannot be more satisfactorily answered than by the revival of Homilies upon portions of Scripture, to approximate in this way to the practice of the primitive Church is a safer method and a sounder policy than to revive antiquated ceremonies which were never essential, and are now alien from our manners; and, as experience has unhappily proved, offensive to the people whom we ought to conciliate. "The faith once delivered to the saints" we are still bound to communicate, and at no time can it be withheld and the Church not suffer loss; but external forms and observances may be expected to be accommodated to the wishes, and even the prejudices, of the age.

Progression in every thing seems the demand

of our times. In a fuller knowledge and a clearer understanding of Scripture it is, to say the least, as necessary as in other matters; and to this end nothing can better contribute than strictly Scriptural preaching, which is secured by Homilies upon portions of Scripture. A fulness of knowledge may thus be gained which sermons, based upon a single text, can hardly supply. When a person's words are only partially reported to us, his whole meaning cannot be certainly known, at least, it is liable to be mistaken. It is notorious that all the heresies which have infested the Church rest upon detached texts; that by these, taken separately, any one of them seems capable of proof, though by the whole tenor of Scripture they can all be satisfactorily refuted. From passages, therefore, complete in themselves, and not from isolated texts, the whole truth is to be collected*.

The plan which the writer has here attempted and most imperfectly executed himself, he ven-

* The excellent biographer of Archbishop Leighton tells us: "Large portions of Holy Scripture were preferred by him, as subjects for sermons, to single texts; for he thought they offered more scope for pithy practical remark, and were better calculated to engage the attention of the auditors."—*Life*, prefixed to his Works, p. 58.

tures to recommend to those of his clerical brethren who have more leisure and greater abilities to pursue and improve upon it. From the abundance of matter supplied, and the assistance to be obtained from commentators, a Homily of this kind will be found an easier composition than a sermon restricted to a short text. Originality is not required. Scriptural knowledge, clear ideas, and the command not of fine but of plain and simple language, will be sufficient to furnish a man for this work who aims at usefulness rather than reputation. And surely the display of eminent abilities, the highest praise that composition can win, is not to a well-regulated mind a consideration to be weighed against the satisfaction of contributing, by a humble but profitable work, to the edification of the common people, for whose instruction, it must be remembered, the Homily is especially designed.

It is at this satisfaction that I aim in the present unpretending little work. The doctrines of the Sermon on the Mount are so transcendently important, that attention can hardly be called to them without a beneficial effect. If I have interpreted them truly, explained them clearly, and enforced them impressively, I have done my part. The matter itself is divine, and

will make its way to hearts and minds, properly disposed, if fairly laid before them ; and if any are induced by the present exhibition of them to consider them with the seriousness their deep importance deserves, the result, I am persuaded, will be their moral and spiritual improvement.

HOMILY I.

ST. MATTHEW v. 3—10.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

IF there are some parts of Scripture more instructive than others, as doubtless there are, we may justly expect to derive the greatest benefit from those which contain the discourses of Jesus Christ. For He is not only our Saviour and Redeemer, He is our Teacher as well; and it is by His divine instructions that we trust to be guided in our passage to a better world. He came from heaven expressly to teach men that which they were unable to discover by their own reason. Till He appeared, the world was doubtful whether there were a future state or not: whether there were one or more Gods, and how He or they were to be appeased and propitiated,—what was agreeable to them, or rendered

their worshippers acceptable. Hence they worshipped they knew not what; and that, too, with rites the most stupid and superstitious, foul and disgraceful. And such is still the case where the doctrines of Christ are unknown. Thus, whilst we see the necessity there was for a divine Teacher, we cannot doubt the obligation laid upon us, whom He has condescended to instruct, to pay the most earnest attention to His divine lessons; since we may learn from them, what we can learn from no other source, the knowledge of ourselves and of our state hereafter, the knowledge of God, and of the way to please Him.

Of the discourses of Christ, the first and the most memorable is that which, from the place where it was delivered, is usually called the Sermon on the Mount, the first eight verses of which I purpose now to explain and comment upon.

Our Lord commences His discourse in a manner that must have awakened all the interest of the vast multitudes who had flocked to hear so extraordinary a teacher. The way to happiness is what all men desire to know, and what the wise have generally professed to teach. He begins, therefore, by shewing what description of men, according to the maxims of His Gospel, might be considered happy, or, in Scripture phrase, "blessed." And here He discovers at once how different were His views of happiness from the notions which the world commonly entertains of it. For ask men who are the happy? they will probably say the powerful and the rich, or those, at least, who

are in easy circumstances; those who can gratify their wishes, and indulge their passions, and who are strangers to the sorrows and the struggles of life. This, we know, is the popular idea of happiness. But it is a false one, and therefore our Lord corrects it at the outset, by affording other and juster notions of the true blessedness of man. And this He makes to consist in the very points which the world commonly overlooks, in their moral character, in their state with respect to God and to a future world. According to our Saviour's representation of the subject, it matters not whether we are great or low, prosperous or unfortunate, in our worldly circumstances. These things at least, are only so far favourable or otherwise to happiness, as they are favourable or otherwise to goodness. For it is the happiness of the whole man which this Teacher from heaven proposes to consult; not his comfort or enjoyment during a small part of his existence, but his well-being to all eternity. This is that great object which he who pursues and gains is to be pronounced "blessed." To be fit for Heaven, and in the end to obtain it, is alone blessedness. As if He had said: "Happy are they who possess the qualifications which recommend them to God and will be rewarded by Him!" And natural as it is to desire a different sort of happiness, you cannot but see that this, in fact, is the chief good of man, and that it is the very thing which we should expect to be taught by a Messenger from heaven who revealed a future state. The happiness of that state must be the most desirable of all

objects, the qualifications for it the most valuable of all attainments.

Do we then desire, or can we fail to desire this blessedness, which extends to heaven and to eternity? Let us hear from this divine Teacher who they are that shall attain it, that so we may be of that happy number.

First, then, He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" 'in spirit,' i.e. in their minds, not in their circumstances. The humble soul which entertains no high ideas of its own superiority, but is conscious of its weakness and frailty, which is dissatisfied with its own attainments, and apt to distrust itself, such a soul is pleasing to God. It leans upon Him, and obtains His gracious aid. They who possess it, are so far in the way to Heaven. The world may admire the high and enterprising spirit, that looks down upon the rest of mankind as upon inferior beings, that aims at what is great, and too often forgets what is good. Such a temper has not the blessing of Christ, though often an attendant upon great natural powers; for the consciousness of these engenders only pride, while their possessor considers not who bestowed them, to what end they were given, or to what duties they bind their possessor. Such a temper is not likely to lead a man to Heaven. It is the very opposite to that poverty of spirit which enables a man to exclaim with the Psalmist: "Lord, I am not high-minded, I have no proud looks. I refrain my soul and keep it low: yea, my soul is even as a weaned child."

We have now the reason assigned for this blessedness,—“For theirs is the kingdom of heaven;” and it is observable that these sentences which contain the beatitudes are all framed in the same manner. First men are pronounced “blessed,” and then the reason follows, as here, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Humility and poverty of spirit, as they prepared men to enter into the Church of Christ, which is called “the kingdom of heaven,” so to the members of that Church they still are a preparation for that future happiness, which is to be enjoyed in the kingdom of heaven hereafter, and hence arises the blessedness of those who possess them.

Christ next declares that, “Blessed are they that mourn,” which would have seemed a hard and a strange saying, but for the reason that He subjoins, “For they shall be comforted:” our Saviour does not commend mourning as good in itself, but good in its effects and consequences. For as David said of himself, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept Thy word:” and again, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes,” we may understand in what view affliction is a blessing. It is because it brings men to a sense of religion. It raises or recalls their thoughts to God. The mourner takes comfort in the reflection that, however dealt with in this world, he is not forsaken. He has a refuge above: he has a Father merciful to forgive, and a Friend gracious to save and to restore him. Thus he is truly *comforted*. But then it is evident that it is only when

afflictions are religiously viewed and received, that they can be a blessing. Those who are not amended by trouble will feel it rather as a curse. For "the sorrow of the world worketh death." Hence some have restricted this blessing to those who mourn for their sins. And certainly no mourners are so surely blessed as these, "They who thus sow in tears shall reap in joy." And such mourners are certain to be comforted, for the sins which they bewail will be forgiven them. But though "the godly sorrow that worketh repentance" is in the highest sense a blessing, we need not confine the expression to such mourners as these. The uses of affliction, we see, are manifold, and the promises of comfort to the mourner are most worthy of a gracious Saviour.

Again, "Blessed are the meek." There is a spirit natural to men, and too much applauded in the world, which leads them to be impatient of all reproof, to resent every affront, to imagine themselves upon all occasions deprived of their rights, or of the respect due to them. Hence they are overbearing and contentious, or fretful, quarrelsome, and uneasy. Such a temper is most unfavourable to happiness, even in this world, where wrongs and offences, real or apparent, are of perpetual occurrence. Now the meek are they who never willingly give offence, and do not readily or hastily take it. They have no high sense of their own importance, but are modest and unassuming, and, pursuing their own ends calmly and peaceably, are seldom molested. "They shall inherit the earth."

Whilst others are quarrelling and disputing for what they may never gain, or having gained never enjoy, the meek obtain all that is valuable below, the quiet possession of what is their own, the fruits of their own industry, and with it tranquillity of mind, and the goodwill of all about them. Such are the advantages of meekness, a quality which above every other makes us happy in ourselves, and amiable among mankind. Hence the promise to this virtue is that of temporal, or present happiness; for this must be meant by "inheriting the earth^a," an expression taken from the Psalmist. The effects of meekness will be seen in the temper with which the common duties of life are performed. It will make the master kind, gentle, and considerate; and the servant obedient, submissive, and respectful. Under this head we must observe that Christ has made the regulation of the temper a necessary part of His religion, the truly meek are always good-tempered. Such is meekness with respect to men. But there is a meekness with respect to God which is not to be excluded here. The word implies a spirit of resignation and contentedness, and is opposed to murmuring against the divine laws, as if they were harder than we could keep, and to repining at our situation and circumstances, as if we were hardly treated by Providence. Christian meekness leads men to reverence the laws of God, to acknowledge that "His commandments are not grievous," to resign

^a "The meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."—Psalm xxxvii. 11.

themselves to the events of life without complaining, considering that God has a right to dispose them as He will, and believing that He will order them for the best.

We are next taught that "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." "Hunger and thirst" is a strong expression for any vehement desire. Now such a desire, unless it be gratified, is so far from being a blessing, that it is a real torment. Hence, some have thought that the future punishment of those who have gratified their desires unlawfully, will be to retain those desires, when there will be no objects, nor means to gratify them. But, however this be, it is the blessing of those "who hunger and thirst after righteousness," that is, who earnestly desire the renewal of their minds in righteousness, "that they shall be filled." We are all, God knows, far enough from righteousness in a strict sense: it is well if we are so in any, if we are not positively wicked. But if we desire to be made better, we may become so. There is no desire that God will so certainly gratify as the longing after holiness. It is for this that He promises the help of His Holy Spirit to Christians of all ages and conditions, to supply them with that goodness in which they are naturally deficient. Even the heathens taught that virtue was acquired, not born with us. But though you are not righteous in the sense that a Christian may be so, yet if you desire and labour to become so, blessed are you: for that desire shall be fulfilled. The pains you take for this

end will be successful; the prayers you offer for this object shall assuredly be heard.

Christ proceeds to declare that "Blessed are the merciful." The excellence of mercy, of a kind, compassionate, and charitable disposition, is acknowledged by all. Upon this we need not dwell, but remember the reason for the blessing: "for they shall obtain mercy." And whether we understand by that word a disposition to relieve the wants and miseries of others, or to compassionate their frailties, and forgive their faults (for the word may mean either, and here, probably, means both), it is clearly the very disposition we should wish God to exercise towards us. If in either sense we need His mercy, His pity for our sorrows, or His pardon for our faults, and if it is a blessing to obtain it, let us remember that it is to be obtained by being merciful ourselves. Only let us not think it enough to be compassionate in our feelings. It is a virtue to be reduced to action. Charitable deeds of every kind, but especially almsgiving, are necessary to entitle us to this blessing.

Again, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

The grace of purity consists in temperance, soberness, and chastity, and to be "pure in heart" implies that we should be chaste, sober, and temperate, not in the outward act only, but in the inward principle; that we should abhor all excess, should be inwardly modest, free from all impure and irregular desires. This is the quality which, above all, preserves what is called

steadiness of character, the want of which is almost certain ruin even in this world. But if the thoughts of the heart are not pure, the conduct can hardly be regular ; or, if it be, the struggle to be maintained between outward propriety and decency and wrong inclinations within will be found difficult and dangerous, injurious both to health and happiness. You must strive, therefore, to be pure in heart even for the sake of present comfort and reputation, but more especially with a view to the approbation of God and the blessing of your Saviour. For it is no common reward that He promises to "the pure in heart:" He declares that "they shall see God," which cannot but mean a very high degree of blessedness in heaven. For it is in speaking of this happiness that St. John tells us—"We are now the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." And he adds what is more to our present purpose : "Every one that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Let the young of either sex, who are most liable to be tempted by impure passions, learn from these words the importance of purity ; and remember that, in violating it, they not only sin most fatally, but forfeit that perfect happiness which is promised to "the pure in heart," — the happiness of seeing God, the highest, probably, which our nature is capable of enjoying. Our Saviour continues : "Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God."

The admiration of men attends those who distinguish themselves by warlike achievements. But ambition, and the heroic spirit, as it is called, have produced too much misery in the world to have the praise of Christ. Greater in His sight, and more glorious than the mightiest conquerors, are they who labour for peace, for the public peace, if it be their province or in their power to promote it, or for the peace of individuals, which, happily, all can promote. The peace of the community, the neighbourhood, and the family in which we live, should be the private concern of every one of us. And if we are peaceable ourselves, and labour by all prudent means to reconcile the differences of others, blessed are we, for we "shall be called the children of God." We shall be rewarded as those who resemble Him whose grand design with respect to man was to send "peace upon earth," and who, when He was preparing to leave the world, left this precious bequest to his disciples: "Peace I leave to you; My peace I give unto you."

In the preceding verses our Lord points out to men, in the blessings which He pronounces, the qualifications which they must possess, if they would obtain the favour of God and heavenly happiness; and thus He most effectually recommends these graces. If endued with these peculiar virtues they would be happy in the next life; but with respect to the present, their trials and persecutions would only be increased by the very conduct which would separate and distinguish them from the world. That world being

itself wicked is naturally at enmity with goodness. Yet in the midst of its persecutions Christ pronounces His followers blessed.

“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake : for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven,”—
“Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake.”

And as if this were not enough, He addresses Himself to the persecuted, and bids them exult and triumph in their sufferings : “Rejoice and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

These latter passages may relate more particularly to the Apostles and disciples of Christ at that time, many of whom were about to be exposed to the greatest trials for the profession of His religion, and needed these assurances to support their minds under them. But as, in a greater or a less degree, persecution, reproach, and mockery, will always attend good Christians in an evil age, and whoever will do his duty must at times encounter difficulty, opposition, and abuse ; we have yet need to remember that under such circumstances the blessing of our Saviour is upon us. Whatever troubles we meet with for His sake, for the sake of religion and of duty, “great is our reward in heaven.” Such, and much worse treatment was incurred by the prophets and Apostles of old, by the first Christians, and by numbers, too, in later times, not unworthy followers of them, by the martyrs of our own

land, those holy men who, we believe, are now rejoicing in the fulfilment of their Saviour's promise in a state "where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest;" and if we had a Christian sense of glory, my brethren, we should, as our Saviour bids us, "rejoice" to be associated even in suffering with worthies such as these.

Thus you see that throughout these blessings our Lord adheres to one and the same principle: of all whom He pronounces to be blessed, it is for this simple reason, that they are in such a state, are possessed of such qualities, that God approves them, and will receive them to happiness. According to the sense of Christ's word, no one can be blessed who is not in the way to heaven. As far as he is a good Christian, so far is he a happy man.

Brethren, when you have learnt to think that your happiness in a future state is the most important of all your concerns, that it is "the one thing needful," that your present interest, your success in life, your portion of pleasure or of favour with mankind are considerations infinitely inferior to this, you will have learnt the sacred lesson which Christ here designs to teach you; and you will have profited by that lesson to your eternal benefit when you have set yourselves to acquire, or rather when you have acquired, the qualifications which He pronounces to be blessings. When, in obedience to His words, you have become humble-minded and lowly in heart; when you are touched with godly sorrow for your sins, or when

God's painful visitations have brought you to repentance and amendment ; when the temper of your mind is meekness and gentleness ; when the strongest desire of your hearts is to increase in all goodness ; when you are kind, charitable, and forgiving to your fellow creatures ; when you have purified your hearts from irregular desires ; when, peaceable yourselves, you seek the peace of others ; and when, in spite of trouble and reproach, of difficulty and danger, you pursue the narrow path of Christian duty,—then you will have attained to real blessedness. For what, after all, is real blessedness ? It is what Christ declares it to be. It consists in real goodness, producing on earth peace and satisfaction of mind, and leading, through the mercy of God, to endless happiness in heaven.

HOMILY II.

ST. MATTHEW v. 13—16.

"Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted ? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick ; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

IT has ever been the practice among the teachers of the East to convey their instructions in comparisons taken from passing objects, or from such things, at least, as are familiar to the minds of their hearers. And, whilst they thus speak of things not far removed from their view, and certainly within their comprehension, they gain the attention of persons who would not have considered the subjects of which they treat, had they been set before them in the dry, uninteresting way of a formal discourse. Such, we find, was the method almost invariably observed by our Lord in His teaching ; and when it is considered that it was His object to make all descriptions of men acquainted with His doctrine because they were necessary to the instruction of all, we shall rather admire His conde-

scension in bringing down to the level of their understanding, matters so important in terms so plain and intelligible, than be surprised at the mention of things common and even mean in themselves, but which, as applied by Him, convey not only the most excellent sense, but the most serious instruction. Thus, in the expression of the text, "Ye are the salt of the earth," we find a most grave and important lesson delivered in this simple phrase. For the use of salt is to season things, to give them flavour, to keep them wholesome, and preserve them from corruption. And so it is the intention of Christ that His disciples should, by the excellence of their example, the purity of their character, and their wise and virtuous conduct, give a seasoning, as it were, to the morals of mankind. Through their means the society of men should be preserved from that corruption to which they are naturally too much inclined. It is not only the desire of a good Christian to make his fellow-creatures better; he can hardly mix with them without producing that effect to a certain extent. They who see "men of like passions with themselves" scrupulously abstaining from everything sinful, and practising what is right, are secretly edified by the goodness which they witness. In the presence of such an one they feel ashamed of their sins, and, for a time at least, forbear to commit them. Before one who is known to reverence the name of God, the swearer forgets his oaths, the profane person ceases to blaspheme. As it has been said, that in the presence of a virtuous woman the loose of both sexes are awed;

so when the wicked are thrown into the company of real Christians, they lose for a while their hardened nature, and discover some sense of religion.

Nor can it be without benefit to them to be thus forcibly reminded of that better path, from which they have so unhappily strayed, by a living instance of one who is walking in it. They cannot help secretly wishing that they were themselves in as good a state as he whose example is before their eyes; and in many instances, from beholding the conversation of good men, the sinner feels himself reprov'd, is struck with self-condemnation, and desires and resolves, sometimes effectually, to imitate what he approves. The better sort of men, therefore, need never feel abashed when they are in the presence of the bad. They are objects of secret reverence to those whom they imagine to scorn them, and this, too, at the very time they are openly ridiculing and scoffing at them. For, disposed as we are to sin, the example of good and religious persons is yet a powerful check to it; and, on the other hand, we can hardly see a Christian duty practised without desiring, and perhaps endeavouring, to "go and do likewise." Yes, fallen though we are, we yet retain a moral nature, we feel how much disgrace is reflected upon us by the example of the good; and the influence of vice over good is lessened as often as we come into contact with real worth. When, therefore, our Lord sent forth into the world His first disciples, reformed by His Word and sanctified by His Spirit, they were indeed "the salt of the earth." No one could associate

with them without learning of them some excellence, or feeling himself reprov'd in his sins. Go where they would, it was the effect as well of the truths which they taught, as of the examples which they afforded, to counteract prevailing corruption, to season the minds of men with genuine piety, and preserve them untainted by the evil influence of a wicked world.

You will now, I think, understand the meaning of this expression, you will see in what sense Christ might say to His disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth," that He intended by these significant words to denote the wholesome effect which their good lives and doctrines would produce upon mankind.

But it is not sufficient to see the primary meaning of the words, you are to consider whether they may not be made instructive to yourselves. How can it be said of you that "Ye are the salt of the earth?" As by your Christian profession you are the disciples of Christ, it ought indeed to be said of you,—you have been brought up in the knowledge of God, you have imbibed the pure precepts of the Christian religion; whatever evil practices there are in the world, whatever of immorality or impiety, you have been warn'd at least to renounce them; you know to what such things lead—to the loss of heaven, to misery in the life to come; and, having been thus instructed, if you have resolv'd accordingly, and agreeably to your vows in Baptism, when you go forth into a world, which you know abounds in temptations to sin, you will be prepar'd to oppose rather than to yield to these. The well-

instructed part of you, at least, cannot mix with their fellow-men, without rendering some moral benefit to the community, if it be your desire and your care to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called."

But it happens, unfortunately, that the best religious knowledge, the most correct notions of duty, are sometimes found among those who are little disposed to put in practice the wholesome lessons they have learned. This is the case which our Lord supposes, when He says, "If the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" If My disciples, who should have reformed mankind by spreading the influence of My religion, if they become corrupt, what shall restore them to a sound and right state? Upon what principles are they to be amended? They were possessed, as Christians, of means the most efficacious of attaining to virtue and godliness, and of becoming examples to others. If with these means they have failed, their case is hopeless. They are the unsavoury salt, that is, "good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men."

Consider, my brethren, this just but awful sentence of your Saviour. If you have received good Christian principles, (and it is the care of the Church that you should receive them,) yet if these fail to work upon you and to keep you pure, if, in despite of these, you become giddy, thoughtless, and unsteady, acting in direct opposition to all that you have been taught, to your consciences, and your convictions,—in knowledge Chris-

tians, but in heart and life as corrupt as the world around you,—if it be so, Christ will reject you. Contempt awaits you in this world, condemnation in the next. For if Christian principles cannot preserve you pure, nothing else can do it. This is the only salt that can keep human nature free from corruption, and if in you “this salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?”

But to proceed with our Saviour’s discourse. The next verse illustrates the superior character of His genuine disciples by a more dignified similitude: “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid.”

He had indeed rendered them worthy of such honourable comparisons. “From the darkness” which involved the rest of the world, He had “called them into His marvellous light;” He had imparted to them the knowledge of God and of their duty; He had clearly revealed to them that future state about which mankind were so much in doubt; He had delivered to them the holiest doctrines, the purest commandments, enforced by the most awful sanctions; He had laid open to them the secrets of His Father’s kingdom; He had shewn them what happiness was there in store for man, and how it might be obtained; and having thus prepared and instructed them, and qualified them to be the instructors of others, He expected that by their means the world should be enlightened. The truths which it had so long desired to know were committed to them, that they might convey and communi-

cate them to others. If those around them were the mere children of nature, or "children of this world," ignorant of their high destiny, or not regarding it, it was their office to shew them that they were heirs of a kingdom, to give them the saving knowledge of God and of His Christ, to raise their views from earth to heaven, to carry their hopes forward from time to eternity, to teach them the real importance of life,—that it is not so much on its own account that it is important, but because upon it are suspended heaven and hell, happiness or misery without end! They who were charged with revelations such as these, were indeed "the light of the world," and from the striking point of view in which they must appear to mankind, were as "a city set on a hill." To those who conveyed such knowledge as this, men would look up. "Here are they," it would be said, "who profess to know God and to teach His will; who can inform us what will become of us hereafter; who can resolve this anxious question whether we shall exist again, and whether that existence shall be miserable or happy. They profess to be our guides to heaven, to point out the paths that lead to it. Thus they stand upon an eminence with respect to the rest of mankind. Their whole conduct will be marked and watched. The high pretensions of such a religion will render the actions of all its professors conspicuous. The eyes of mankind will be fixed upon those who are avowedly "a peculiar people zealous of good works."

As nothing makes us more careful and circumspect

in our conduct than the knowledge that we are about to meet the gaze of the world, so when our Lord shewed His disciples that the profession of His religion would draw upon them the attention of mankind, He intimated strongly the necessity of maintaining such a character as would bear the strictest scrutiny, the closest examination; that, since they were to be generally marked and observed, nothing unworthy of their high calling might be seen in them, but as it was the tendency of His religion to raise and elevate them, so it should be their care not to disgrace or degrade themselves.

Indeed, it is not to individual Christians now, at least, that we can so properly apply those expressions, "The light of the world," "A city upon a hill;" but to the Church at large, to the body of Christians collectively, they are most appropriate. An assembly of men who profess to have received from God a revelation of His will with a promise of heaven if they live in obedience to it, is an object to command the respect and admiration of the world; and every member of that community, every private Christian, has in the very existence of that Church "a standing memorial of his duty, and is called, both by precept and example, to attend to it, and by the form of religion ever before his eyes, is reminded of its reality^a." Thus, if he is not "the light," he has the benefit of that light; if he is not "the city," he is of that city. Hence there should be found in him that piety and goodness with

^a Bp. Butler.

that train of Christian graces which may merit, at least, if it does not gain, the approbation and applause of mankind, whilst by doing good in his generation he is fulfilling the end of his being. For as our Lord observes (using another homely comparison to illustrate His meaning), the light imparted to Christians was not meant to be concealed, it was to benefit all who came within its reach: "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light to all that are in the house."

If Christians are better instructed and more enlightened than the rest of men, it were a shameful thing if there were nothing in their conduct that distinguished them from others, if their works were not more excellent in proportion as their light was more glorious. "Therefore," says our Lord, "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Every Christian has received a precious talent which he is bound not to hide, but to exhibit the excellent effects which his religion has produced upon him, to let it be seen that he is influenced by it. We are not, indeed, to make an ostentatious display of our virtues, but we should let it appear that the morality which the unbeliever is fond of setting in opposition to religion is indeed the very fruit of faith, and is most abundant in Christians, and that the simple belief of the Gospel does more to produce honesty and charity, temperance and purity, than all the lessons of virtue which were ever delivered, apart from religion, either in the old

schools of heathen philosophy, or the modern seminaries of infidelity. We are to make this appear, my brethren, in ourselves by what we are and what we do. There are those in the world who profess to disbelieve our religion, and who watch us narrowly to find in our misconduct an excuse for their unbelief, insinuating that without any faith they may become better than the generality of Christians. And perhaps they may. For, to our shame be it spoken, there are practices common among too many who profess and call themselves Christians, which are reprov'd even by the light of nature^b. But then it is certain that such persons have in them nothing of Christianity but the name. And what judgment can be formed of the influence of a religion from the conduct of those who are confessedly not under that influence. We, however, are required to shew that it does influence ourselves; and let us remember that its influence is only to be maintained by seriousness and devotion, by reading the Word of God, by meditation and prayer for the divine assistance. Then, with the fear of God before our eyes, and the precepts of our Saviour in our heart, we shall be, and we shall appear to be, what we really are, not formal hypocrites, as our enemies suppose, not mere professors of godliness and strangers to its power, but truly good and virtuous men, as far as human crea-

^b "The body of Christians is so universally wicked, that it would be a greater change to see Christians generally live according to their profession, than it was at first from infidelity to see them turn believers."—*Bp. Taylor*.

tures can be so, and that in a much higher degree because we are Christians. And shall they not henceforth see that we are in our tempers more meek, in our dispositions more kind, more moderate in our pursuit of worldly gains and pleasures, more fixed in our aversion to everything base, loose, and irregular; more resolute in our adherence to what is right, more zealous in our performance of what is good, for this cause, that we are Christians? In short, shall they not witness in us the efficacy of Christian principles, so that they may form a favourable opinion of a religion which in its sincere profession works such excellent effects, and be induced to believe that it must have proceeded from God, since it tends so certainly to the perfection of man? This would be to teach "men by our good works to glorify our Father which is in heaven."

In the progress of this discourse we shall see that to do good works "in order to be seen of men" is displeasing to God, and deprives those works of their reward; but here we are bidden to "let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works." Is not this a contradiction? By no means. Every one understands that good actions performed from motives of vanity and ostentation, lose their value, because they proceed from a wrong principle; whereas what is done with a view, in the first place, to please God, and done openly that men may be encouraged to imitate it and give God the glory, is meritorious as far as anything human can be so. Besides, as it is wrong, on one side, to be vain of our good deeds; it is, on the

other, a great fault to be ashamed of them. The increase of goodness and virtue in the world is the desire, and should be the object, of every sincere Christian; and to give confidence to the better part of mankind, who, from the fewness of their numbers, might otherwise be discouraged, it is right that Christian principles should be, not paraded certainly, but manifested at least upon all fit occasions by those who are actuated by them. It is unworthy of a Christian to seem influenced by no higher motives than those which men of the world profess. The motive here set before us is the highest and the grandest upon which it is possible for men to act,—that our good deeds may contribute to the glory of God. Were not these the words of a divine Instructor, it might seem presumption to suppose that creatures such as we are could promote the glory of God by anything that we do. Yet nothing is more frequently enjoined to Christians than to act with this view, and with this view we find that holy men have ever acted. St. Paul exhorts us to let this motive enter into all that we do, into actions seemingly the most indifferent: “Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God^c.”

^c See 1 Cor. x. 31.

HOMILY III.

ST. MATTHEW v. 17—20.

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

"Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

OUR Saviour, in His Sermon on the Mount, is addressing a congregation of Jews. We are come to that part of the discourse which could not be understood if this were not remembered. These Jews valued themselves, not without reason, upon a law which they had received from God Himself by the hand of Moses. For when, after the flood, men had forgotten the awful lesson which that event should have taught them,—that there is a God who will protect the righteous and punish the wicked,—and were now gradually growing more and more ignorant of true religion, and becoming more vicious and corrupt, it pleased God to preserve among one people the knowledge of Himself, and to

give them a law which should instruct them in their duty to Him and to mankind. He also raised up among them prophets, that is, men inspired by Him, and so enabled to teach and instruct them, and by their means He kept up in their minds an expectation of a Messiah who should be the Saviour of the world. This people were the Jews; this was "the Law" and these "the Prophets" of which our Lord speaks in the text, and affirms that He came not to destroy but to fulfil them, as He was indeed Himself the very person foretold both by the Law and the Prophets.

As Christ now appeared in the character of a public teacher, and had given His hearers many new rules of life and conduct, they might be inclined to suspect that He was about to introduce a new law and to abolish that which they had received from Moses. He assures them, therefore, that they need apprehend nothing of this kind, that He was prepared to render obedience to their law Himself, and to inculcate the same upon His followers. We must, therefore, consider that He is here speaking of the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments, for that part only of the Mosaic law is binding upon Christians, as was largely shewn by His Apostles afterwards, when they had received the Holy Ghost. If, then, these commandments are still a law to Christians, not because they are the law of Moses, but because they are the law of God confirmed in Christ; familiar as they are to us, we must not pass them over, considering with what solemnity Christ speaks of their perpetual obligation. "Till heaven and earth pass, one

jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law till all be fulfilled." Now these commandments teach us to acknowledge no other than the one true God, not to worship that God under any form or similitude, which is called idolatry; not to invoke His name vainly, lightly, or falsely, but only in the cause of truth and justice; to observe one day in seven in grateful remembrance of their Creator and Redeemer. They further direct men to honour their parents; they forbid murder, adultery, theft, false witness, and all covetous desires. The things here commanded are so evidently the duty of all who have right ideas of the relation in which they stand to their Maker and their fellow-creatures, that had Christ affirmed (what has been affirmed by some zealous professors of His religion, but whose zeal was not according to knowledge) that Christians were not under the law in this sense, we must have hesitated to receive Him "as a teacher sent from God." But you see He asserts the very reverse of this, that so far from coming to destroy the law, He designed it to be binding upon men till the end of the world. Accordingly our Church in her Articles maintains on good grounds that "no Christian man whatever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral." And indeed, when we read the words of Christ, so fully, so strongly has He expressed Himself, that it seems astonishing that the idea could ever enter into a Christian's mind that there was any hope of salvation by Christ where the moral law was wilfully broken; that any should have believed, much less have

taught in His name, that morality was a secondary consideration in a Christian. For what are His words? "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

If such, then, were the words of Christ Himself, we are surely justified in warning you to suspect the soundness of any preaching which should tend to lessen your regard for morality, or would lead you to doubt whether obedience to the commandments of God is the way to salvation. Surely to be called "great in the kingdom of heaven" might satisfy the desire of the most zealous Christian. And to whom is this promised? To him who shall observe the least of these commandments, that is, the least as well as the greatest, thinking himself equally bound by them all, and therefore conscientiously keeping the very least of them. Here, then, you are to be cautioned not to admit the notion that if some duties are observed, others may be neglected; that if you are not guilty of worshipping false gods, you may neglect the worship of the true; that if you are not a swearer, nor a profane person, you may break the Sabbath; that if you abhor such crimes as murder, adultery, and theft, you need not so cautiously avoid "evil speaking, lying and slandering;" or that, if honest, you may be covetous; or if free from these, may be guilty of any vices more agreeable to your inclinations. If you wilfully break the least of these

commandments, you "shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." So Christ declares, and His Apostles St. Paul and St. James agree in asserting the same thing: "He that offends in one point is guilty of all," because it is not to a part but to the whole of God's law that he is bound.

But, further, there is a sort of obedience rendered to these commandments which Christ rejects, and which he calls "the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees." The Scribes were those Jewish doctors who wrote copies of the law and professed to explain it to the people; the Pharisees a sect who boasted of keeping it in its minutest points and with peculiar strictness, and who were scrupulous about its forms and ceremonies, but had little real love of goodness at the heart. And they had contrived such methods of explaining it away, as to evade its force and make it appear less strict than it was designed to be. To effect this, they pretended to have received by tradition the interpretation which their pious forefathers had given to these commandments, together with many rules and observances which, though not written in the law, were, they declared, highly pleasing to God, and rendered those who practised them more righteous in His sight. Thus whilst they had the presumption to relax the strict law of God, they gave the force of law to their own traditions, and taught men to rely for acceptance upon the obedience to them. Against such teachers as these it was the object of our Lord to guard the people, and especially His disciples; and He there-

fore loses no opportunity of exposing the hypocrisy and false pretences of the Scribes and Pharisees. Accordingly He here declares, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

In opposition to these, He comments upon several of the Commandments, and shews that they did not require less, but more than the bare words expressed. Thus, on the Sixth Commandment He remarks, "Ye have heard that it was said to them^a of old time, Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause^b shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother 'Rakah' (a word implying great contempt) shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say 'Thou fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire."

In these words is shewn that not only the horrid act of murder is "a sin unto death," but that all those passions of anger and hatred from which murder proceeds, though they only break forth in abusive and contemptuous words, will be punished by God, that the restraint, therefore, is to be laid upon these passions. Alas, how little is this attended to by Christians! for what slight offences are they often violently

^a *To*, not *by*, as in the common reading. See Whitby *in loco*.

^b The words "without a cause" imply that when there is a just and sufficient cause we may "be angry and sin not."

angry with their brethren, and how easily provoked to such expressions as these, or worse than these, which Christ has condemned as deserving of hell fire. Now let us remember that it is not the act nor the words, so much as the bitterness of heart, the badness of disposition which prompts us to these things, that really renders us the objects of God's displeasure. Let us cultivate a better temper, let us be humbled for every expression of rage and malice that has escaped us, and being made sensible that our hearts which dictated such things, were "not right before God," that we are yet "in the gall of bitterness," let us ask of Him the help of His Holy Spirit to work in us kinder and milder dispositions.

In the next three verses Christ directs us to beware of indulging any hatred towards those with whom we may be at variance; to call to mind, before we presume to appear before God, whether we have not given our brother just cause to be offended with us, and, if so, to hasten to him to be reconciled: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison."

Christ here, as elsewhere, requires the offender to

seek the reconciliation; and indeed nothing is more reasonable than that the party who has given the offence should make the first advance, by acknowledging his error and desiring forgiveness. It is men's unwillingness to do this which keeps up enmities, for few, I believe, would refuse to forgive if they who had done the wrong would confess it, and ask pardon of the party aggrieved. He is plainly condemned by Christ, and must be highly guilty in the sight of God, who, knowing that he has given just cause of offence, refuses to make those concessions which are due to the offended in order to be reconciled. This is not only to commit an injury, but to perpetuate it, to give just cause for hatred, to be at once unjust and uncharitable. Such an offender Christ represents to be "cast into prison," and adds, "Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." And as here the pains and penalties inflicted by man are put to signify future punishments, these words imply that God will punish with lasting severity those wrongs against our fellow-creatures for which we have not been careful to obtain their pardon here.

It is of importance to observe that as there is nothing to which our nature is more averse than the confession of a fault done to another, so if we would avoid this, which we see is absolutely required of every offender, we must keep such a constant watch over ourselves that it may never be necessary; that is, we must scrupulously abstain from doing wrong, from giving just cause of offence to any one.

Our Lord having thus shewn that all injurious conduct to man is forbidden by the same law that forbids murder, the highest degree of it, proceeds in the same way with respect to the seventh commandment, that forbids adultery. Not only is that crime forbidden, but all crimes of that class of which adultery is the chief: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

We are apt to imagine that we are not likely to offend against the seventh commandment, that we are in no danger of committing adultery. But it is plain that, in our Saviour's sense of it, it will need all our watchfulness, all our Christian caution to keep ourselves innocent in this respect. Would you keep yourselves pure? do not suffer your minds to dwell upon that, which cannot be committed without sin, nor thought of without an approach to it. Here it is possible to offend even by a look. Gaze not, therefore, upon a forbidden object so as to desire it. The eye should be modest, and the heart pure. Is there anything dear to your affections as a right hand or a right eye? yet if it cannot be innocently enjoyed, if it would cause you to offend, abandon it, before it lead you into sin. For consider the end of sin: it is eternal death. "When lust," saith St. James, "hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Such is the purport of our Lord's next words: "If thy right eye offend thee," (or rather cause thee to offend,) "pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand cause thee to offend, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."

Here we should observe, in opposition to the loose notions of the world, how awfully severe are the words of our Saviour, how strongly He expresses the sinfulness of indulging the natural passions. He intimates that the whole body will be cast into hell for these sins, which, because they are natural, are apt to be thought pardonable. Natural they undoubtedly are, but in a corrupt nature what is natural is not innocent. "Fleshly lusts" are said to "war against the soul," and therefore Christians, at their baptism, have vowed to renounce them.

As divorce was common among the Jews, often upon very insufficient reasons, our Lord in the next two verses declares that to divorce a wife unless she had been unfaithful to the marriage bed, was to cause adultery, and that to marry one so divorced was to commit adultery. "It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery" (if she marry again,

because she is the wife already of another) : "and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced, committeth adultery."

The next commandment upon which our Saviour comments is the third, which requires that we should not swear falsely by the name of God, whence the interpreters of the law had most unwarrantably concluded that swearing falsely by other things was not so heinous an offence. And thus they were in the habit of swearing "by heaven, by the earth, by the temple, and by their own heads," and they made no conscience of keeping such oaths as these.

"Again ye have heard that it hath been said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black." Thus Christ reminds the swearer, that swear by whatever he would, God was present and a witness to the oath, and by consequence, an avenger if it were false. And as the habit of swearing would lessen men's reverence for an oath on proper occasions, and would cause them often to swear falsely, He forbids it altogether in common conversation, and reserves it as the last appeal to Himself for those solemn occasions in which truth and justice are concerned.

"But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay,

may: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil," or rather "from the evil one."

The duty of a Christian is to affirm or deny simply and plainly, without heat or undue vehemence, which lead to wanton oaths not warranted by the occasion, and therefore, as sinful, condemned by Christ. Common swearing, we observe here, is said to proceed "from the evil one." Hence its wickedness is apparent; the state of mind which prompts men to utter oaths in common conversation, is produced by that bad influence of the devil, our spiritual enemy, against whom we should be ever on our guard.

Thus we see, my brethren, that the Teacher who came from heaven to instruct us how we might please God and obtain His favour here and hereafter, has given His most solemn sanction to these moral laws contained in the Ten Commandments. We hear Him in the most direct terms declaring that they will never cease to be binding upon men so long as heaven and earth endure; and further, we find that they must be fulfilled, not only in the letter, but in the spirit, for what He has shewn in the case of two or three of the commandments may be applied to all. He will not accept obedience to the terms of the commandment whilst the principle of them is disregarded. Above all, He aims at bringing men to such a temper of mind that their fulfilment of His laws may not consist in forced and formal actions, but may flow naturally from a good will.

And now it is most important to ask ourselves whether

our hearts are fully "set to obey those commandments." Have we attained anything like that religious disposition which will incline us to fulfil one part of the divine law, and that love of mankind which will make us obedient in the other part, since "love," both to God and man, is the "fulfilling of the law?" It is not so much our actions as our principles that these precepts of Christ are intended to rectify. We may not be (it is to be hoped we are not) murderers or adulterers, profane or perjured persons; but have we in our hearts the love or the fear of God to restrain us from what He forbids, and make us delight in what He approves? In obedience to Christ, have we mastered the evil passions of anger, revenge, and malice? Is the violence of our tempers restrained by our sense of religion? Can we confess the wrong we have done, and seek reconciliation, and can we be reconciled to him who has offended us? Again, are the affections of our heart pure and innocent, or do we cherish the desire for gratifications that are forbidden us? And does our modesty and chastity reside "in the hidden man of the heart?"

We see how strict are the precepts of our Lord, and how difficult, how almost impossible, it seems to "fulfil the law" according to His pure interpretation of it. Yet His beloved disciple has declared that "His commandments are not grievous." If we find them so, it is because there is something amiss in us; our faith, in the first place, is weak or wanting, for otherwise should we think much of any course by which hell is

escaped, and heaven secured? Or we do not love our Lord as we ought to do? If we did, it would be our delight to do His commandments, since we know that where love is, we cannot do too much to please. Yet surely Christ deserves our love. Did He not leave heaven for our sakes? did He not suffer the miseries of life in going about to teach men the way to happiness? and did He not submit to a painful death to purchase the forgiveness of our sins, to make it possible for His holy Father to receive us into favour? Is He not gone to prepare for us one of the many mansions in His Father's house, and is He not now interceding for us that we may be admitted there? This did Christ; and hence he claims our love, a love that will produce a willing obedience to His commandments. If we feel that we are wanting in this love, (and undoubtedly we are, in exact proportion as we are indisposed to the duties He requires,) let us confess the lamentable deficiency to God, and ask of Him His almighty help, that, "His love being shed abroad in our hearts by His Holy Spirit," we may be both disposed and enabled to render such obedience as He will accept and reward for Christ's sake.

HOMILY IV.

ST. MATTHEW v. 38—44.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth :

"But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

"And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.

"And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.

"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."

SOME of these, it will be thought, are hard sayings.

Our Lord appears to command that which it seems not reasonable, perhaps not possible, to comply with. And yet, lest we should incur the same reproof as the Pharisees, of "making the word of God of no effect" by too lax an interpretation of it, we must be very cautious how we venture to explain away these sayings of our Lord. Did He then mean that we should literally, upon receiving an injury, put ourselves in the way of another, instead of repelling it as nature

prompts? or that, when a part of our property has been wrongfully taken from us, we should voluntarily surrender the rest, and so on? Common sense forbids us to believe that such could be the intention of Christ. The expressions here used are proverbial, and in all proverbs strong terms are employed to make the thing meant appear more striking, but they are seldom or never to be taken literally. We are sure, indeed, that Christ's disciples did not understand it to be their duty to act according to the express words of these precepts, for we find from the Acts of the Apostles that such was not their conduct; that when beaten and injuriously treated, although they bore it with meekness and patience, they certainly did not invite further injury, but rather avoided it, as far as they could without betraying the cause of their Master. Nay, our Saviour Himself, when smitten, reproved the person who struck Him wrongfully: "Why smitest thou Me?" To the abusive language of the High-Priest, St. Paul returned a severe and spirited answer; and when he had been unlawfully scourged, he would not let the wrong pass without expressing his sense of its injustice. In short, in no case does it appear that either Christ or His Apostles gave any encouragement to ill-treatment by the manner in which they met it, as the first words of our text would seem to imply. Interpreting, therefore, the words of our Lord by His example and that of His Apostles, we may safely conclude that these words are not to be understood according to the letter. But the next question is, To what extent they enjoin us to sub-

mit to injuries? It may perhaps be a fair view of the matter to say that His design was, by using the strongest proverbial expressions, to set in the most striking light the different spirit of His law from the spirit of the world in this respect. Thus we may suppose Him to say, So far am I from giving any countenance to that law of retaliation which would return "evil for evil" in every case, which would exact "an eye for an eye" and "a tooth for a tooth," that I should sooner command My followers, by the most unlimited forbearance, to invite a repetition of the wrong, than suffer them to return it in this revengeful way. It is not, I think, improbable that such expressions as our Saviour uses might have been applied by the Jews to those who did not resent injuries with what we are apt falsely to call "a proper spirit." It might perhaps be said of a meek character in such a case, Here is one so tame and poor-spirited that if you smite him on one cheek, he would offer you the other; or of one who would rather bear a little wrong than prosecute it by law; See here a man who, if you took away his upper garment, would give you his under one also; and of an easy complying character, Make this man go with you one mile, and he will go with you two. It is, we know, in such a light as this that men are apt to set the conduct of those who submit to injuries without seeking revenge, and who studiously avoid contention, even though they may be losers by their forbearance. Yet we know that such are a good kind of men, and our Saviour might be expected to express His ap-

probation of those characters to whom such sayings might be scoffingly applied, and to recommend that meek and quiet spirit which the world ridicules and reviles. We are to consider the spirit, therefore, rather than the letter of these precepts. And what do they then enjoin more than what is acknowledged to be the duty of a wise and virtuous man? Is an insult received, the passionate resentment of it is not to be indulged; it is not safe to indulge it, for who, in the heat of provocation, can do only justice between himself and the aggressor? No wonder, therefore, it is commanded that we "resist not evil^a." With a meekness like that which Christ exercised when He said to him that struck Him, "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?" we may expostulate with the injurious person, ask him, firmly but mildly, how we have deserved this treatment; shew him, without heat or violence, the wrong that he has done, and assure him that so far from deserving ill at his hands, we felt nothing but goodwill towards him. Such a return as this would soften the heart of the offending person. He would feel ashamed of the wrong he had done, and be anxious to make amends, an effect which can rarely be produced by an angry demand of satisfaction made in the same spirit in which the injury was committed.

^a "The grand and obvious construction is this, Suffer any injury for the sake of peace when no duty requires the contrary, and commit your interests and concerns to the Lord's keeping."—Scott *in loco*.

Again, suppose that we are wronged in our property, what course must we take? It would surely be unwise to resort at once to hasty measures, to have recourse to the law. For a litigious spirit is not only most unchristian: it fails of its end as often, at least, as it succeeds. Christ's words would direct us to make a friendly representation of what we conceive to be our right. Let the spoiler be assured that if what he has seized can fairly be shewn to be his, we have no wish to claim it, but that we conceive he has, under a mistaken view of the case, appropriated to himself what, upon further consideration, will be found to be ours, and we trust that he will restore it. This is the sort of conduct which Christ intended to prescribe, and it is probable that it would in most instances produce a restitution of what had been taken from us. But were it not so, if the object be important, and the wrong more than we can sustain, we are not forbidden to have recourse to the law, though the litigious spirit, condemned above, is in all cases forbidden. As without laws society cannot subsist, so the good part of it ought certainly to have the benefit of them: and, indeed, it would be the greatest encouragement to robbery and wrong to forbid Christian people to appeal to the law. But then it should be our last resource, and we should have shewn every willingness to avoid that extremity, and even to recede a little from our right, if by so doing we can settle the difference amicably, and with a prospect of preserving peace. For though there are some severe expressions against

going to law in the Epistles of St. Paul, these do not apply to lawsuits in a Christian country. What he there objects to is this: the early Christians summoned each other into heathen courts of justice, by which they exposed not only their disputes, but their offences to the enemies of their religion, thus giving them a bad opinion of it. Whereas they should have settled their differences among themselves, as we find from St. James that they sometimes did, for in his Epistle there are passages addressed to Christians presiding in a court of justice.

The next expressions, "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away^b," are not to be understood without limitation; but they are opposed to the selfish maxims of men of the world, who account it weakness to give, because there are many unworthy objects; and folly to lend, because the borrower often will not, and sometimes cannot, repay. A Christian should abhor such maxims as this. It is his duty freely to bestow, as often as he can do good without injury to himself: nor should he refuse to lend, where he may effectually serve (as he often may) a needy man who has occasion to borrow, and whom a little credit might save from ruin. And undoubtedly we are not to be restrained from acts of benevolence, because we may in some instances meet with ingratitude, or incur occasional loss. For, be it remembered, that our reward is not to be sought in the

^b See 2 Cor. viii. 13, 14.

gratitude of those we relieve, but in the approbation of God, who, having commanded acts of charity, will not fail to recompense them.

We come now to a difficult but a truly divine precept: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy." Such is too much the disposition of nature, such generally was the rule and the practice of the heathens: such, we see, were the notions of the Jews, though undoubtedly there was no foundation for them in their divine law. But as they had no command to "love their enemies," and did not understand, what it was reserved for Christ to shew, that all mankind to whom they could do good were their neighbours, they considered that the silence of their law with respect to their enemies, left them at liberty to indulge their malicious feelings towards them. There was, therefore, great necessity for this new commandment which Christ here authoritatively delivers: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you."

When we consider how strong a passion the desire of revenge is, to which we are stimulated not only by malice, but by pride: and how difficult it is to overcome the feelings of hatred for those who have once displeased us—we may well believe that it was not a mere man who was the author of precepts such as these^c.

^c On the subject of Christian forgiveness, see *Ecce Homo*, chaps. xxiii. and xxiv.

And, further, we must add that no mortal man can keep them, unless he be assisted by the grace of the Gospel. For what is the disposition that we naturally entertain towards our enemies? Are not their very persons odious? Do we not hate to hear even of their good actions? and are we ever better pleased than when their characters are defamed, and we are joining in the abuse? Do we not wish them every evil, and are restrained from doing them evil, only by the law, or by considerations of prudence? And yet we are told, nay, required, *to love them!* How can we fulfil this commandment? Assuredly, my brethren, there is but one way. It is by imploring the grace of God to subdue in us those dispositions of pride and malice, which generate such bitter enmity, and by obliging ourselves, in spite of our natural inclinations, to look upon the most favourable side of their characters, not thinking so much what they are to us, as what they are in themselves. It is not their having offended or even wronged us, that proves them, as we are apt to think, destitute of every good quality. They cannot but have some recommendation. They are fellow-men, and fellow-Christians, and if we could convert them into friends, they are probably not undeserving of our love. When they and we have laid aside our mutual dislikes, we may meet them in heaven. And if that pleasing thought cannot reconcile us to them, we should consider where we must meet them, if we both die in enmity. Forgive them we must, if we would be forgiven, and if we forgive them

from our hearts, we may by a natural and easy transition be brought to love them. But, it must be repeated, in order to fulfil this commandment, the gift of the Holy Spirit is necessary to inspire us with charity and good-will. For this let us never cease to pray. At the same time let us put a force upon ourselves; for before we have attained to loving them, we can at least avoid speaking ill of them, and acting spitefully toward them. We may even tell what we know to their credit, and exert ourselves for their good. Then with respect to praying for them; if they are really the bad men we think them, they are indeed objects of our pity; they are under the displeasure of God, and in the way that leads to destruction. Certainly the most hard-hearted man in the world would melt, if he were to behold his enemy suffering the tortures of disease, or the agonies of death; and if a prayer could relieve or save him, he would surely offer it up. Yet we know that worse things than these are prepared for those "who despitefully use us and persecute us," if they die impenitent. Their case, therefore, calls for our prayers, that they may escape in the day of wrath; that God would shew them mercy, and give them repentance, that they and we may meet hereafter in regions of uninterrupted peace, where the worst miseries and conflicts, by which men agitate each other here, will appear but as the quarrels of wayward children. We may here observe the charity with which our Church, in conformity with the spirit of our Lord, leads us to pray that God "would forgive

our enemies, persecutors and slanderers, and turn their hearts."

But most beautiful is the view which Christ gives us of charity, as displayed towards enemies: He likens it to that universal goodness of God which in the best gifts of His Providence makes no distinction between good and evil men, though the former are styled His friends, and the latter His enemies. "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

After these new and difficult precepts, Christ, as He foresaw that His hearers would be most averse to receive them, turns upon them an argument from the notions which they entertained of their own superiority. For if they wished to be considered better than others, surely a higher degree of charity and benevolence was to be expected of them. Now to shew good offices to those who loved them, was no higher virtue than was practised by those whom they most despised. It was by "loving their enemies" that they would be indeed superior to other men.

"For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the Publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the Publicans so?" By the Publicans here is meant the collectors of the taxes, whose office was odious among the Jews, and who were generally believed to be, (as they too often were,) extortioners, and fraudulent; their characters were held

in high contempt, and not to be superior to them, the Jews would consider most disgraceful.

These precepts of benevolence, purer and more enlarged than the wisest and best of men could ever have conceived, are closed by Christ with this emphatic sentence: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

That is, with respect to the kindness and good-will which I require you to exercise towards men, be not conformed to the maxims of the world, who are swayed by their inclinations in what they do, and make their love or hatred the measure of their kindness and goodness to others. But in this be guided by the example of your heavenly Father himself, whose nature is incapable of ill-will, whose goodness is unbounded, whose bounty is enjoyed by the most unworthy, who grants to the worst of sinners the blessings of this life, freely offers them forgiveness on the most gracious terms, and would, upon their repentance, receive them into heaven.

Happy, my Christian brethren, should I consider myself, if by laying before you these excellent rules, I could imprint them upon your hearts as well as your memories, and cause such benevolence as this to take root in your minds; if you would learn hence to entertain for each other and for all your fellow-creatures such love and kindness, such perfect freedom from pride, malice and selfishness, as Christ here enjoins: if, as often as you mix with the world, you might be found so seasoned, so imbued with Christian charity,

that all its mean and narrow maxims would be unable to corrupt you ; that in this spirit you would resolve to forget all former enmities, to cherish no more feelings of resentment, but looking upon God as your Father, and all mankind as His children, and therefore your brethren, would be prepared to render to each other, as is natural among members of one family, all those kindnesses which good-will prompts, and your means and abilities can afford.

HOMILY V.

ST. MATTHEW vi. 1—6.

"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them : otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

"Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

"But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth :

"That thine alms may be in secret : and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly.

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are : for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

IN this chapter our Saviour animadverteth upon three duties—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting—all which were in high esteem among the Jews, and two of which the Pharisees in particular valued themselves upon performing ; but because in the performance of them they had a view to the praise of men rather than

to the approbation of God, He pronounces of all three, that when so practised, they would not be rewarded in heaven. Not but that these duties are in themselves well-pleasing to God. Christ has elsewhere declared that He will reward, as done to Himself, those acts of charity which we perform to our Christian brethren; and the promises made to prayer in Scripture are without number. Fasting also, when it proceeds from a spirit of penitence, and is used as a means of mortifying our appetites, is an acceptable service, though perhaps not a positive duty, and it is certainly recommended by the example of Christ and His Apostles, and of holy men in the early ages of the Church. But there is wanted in these, as in all other actions, to render them of good account in the estimation of heaven, a pure motive and a right disposition. If alms are bestowed from a spirit of ostentation, which is what our Saviour expresses "by sounding a trumpet before them;" if we relieve the wretched, not from any feeling of compassion to them, nor because God has commanded it, but that we may have the reputation of being charitable, "we have our reward;" we have it now, we shall not have it hereafter. The world, whose applause we seek, will sound our praises; but God, who sees our hearts, and observes there no real kindness of disposition to prompt our good offices, nor any desire of pleasing Him, will not reward such actions by which we were serving another and not Himself.

But though ostentatious charity will fail of its reward

from God because it has what it seeks here in the praise of men, may we not in our alms have a view to future reward? The next verses surely lead us to suppose that we may: "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly."

When our Lord assures us that God will reward us, He certainly intended that we should look to that reward. Indeed, Christ never gave so unamiable a view of His religion as to represent God as rigorously punishing sin, and not rewarding good actions. It is to be feared, indeed, that the cause of morality has been much injured by the injudicious denial of the merit of good works. It is true we cannot by our best actions deserve the forgiveness of sins, much less eternal life; but God who gives these freely to those who believe and repent, requires of us certain actions and promises to reward them. And can we doubt whether such actions are pleasing to Him or not? We may not call them meritorious, but they are at least acceptable, and this is enough for our purpose. But take away the very natural notion that God will reward this or that good action which we find commended in our Bible, and you will be in danger of perplexing many a good practical Christian, and of blighting the best fruits of an honest faith. For surely there is no safer principle than this, which is grounded upon Scripture itself, that "God is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." He who

avoids what is forbidden from a belief that God will punish it, and does what is commanded from a persuasion that God will reward it, may be said to unite the justifying faith of St. Paul with the justifying works of St. James.

It is, moreover, important to observe that our Lord does not discountenance almsgiving, nor prayer, nor fasting in themselves, as they are performed with a view of pleasing God; but He rejects them only when they are done without respect to God, and with the intention of attracting the notice and gaining the good opinion of men. In short, Christ abhors ostentation, but approves charity; and whilst He rejects what proceeds from the one, he will accept and reward what is prompted by the other. Indeed, to the practice of almsgiving, no stronger encouragement can be given than the words of our Saviour: "Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." Upon the strength of these words we may address ourselves to the unaffectedly charitable Christian: "Though thou wast so far from doing thy good deeds with a view to obtain praise by them, that thou didst hardly acknowledge them to thyself; though thy left hand hardly knew what thy right hand was doing, yet there was One who marked these secret charities, One upon whom such acts as these were not lost. It was He who commanded them, and in obedience to whose commands thou didst perform them. And when that day arrives in which not only the bad actions of men shall be recorded to their everlasting confusion, but their good

works shall be blazoned to their eternal glory, thou shalt have all the praise thou didst seek—that of God ; and in the presence of men and angels shalt receive the reward of thy gracious deeds.”

Such thoughts are truly cheering to the heart of those who have the will as well as the ability to do good. Nor let them whose means are humble think that they have no claim to these encouraging expressions, because they have it not in their power to perform such works as can entitle them to a high degree of praise. Acts of kindness they can at least perform ; and a “cup of cold water,” bestowed with a gracious intention, “will not lose its reward.” In that day, indeed, “when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ,” the genuine charities of the poor, which the proud never marked, shall rise up as a memorial before heaven ; then they who have watched by the sick bed of their neighbours, who have sat by and pitied when they could not relieve them, and have performed offices which have much more of kindness in them than the bestowing of money, they will find that “God was not unrighteous to forget their labours of love.” Remember this, my poorer brethren, you may not have it in your power to do much for the sick and wretched, you can do perhaps nothing that men will commend in you, but you can be tender, pitiful, and kind ; and in these dispositions, and the exertions to which they will prompt you, there is enough to entitle you to the reward of “Him who seeth in secret.”

Our Lord then proceeds : “And when thou prayest,

thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are : for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret ; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Here, as before, we are to observe, that it is not the practice of prayer, but the hypocritical ostentation of it, of which Christ speaks in terms of disapprobation. The men whom He condemned, prayed, not to express their sense of God's goodness, not from a penitent desire of His pardon, not from a feeling of their dependence upon Him, not from a wish to engage His grace, His mercy, His protection—not from these sentiments, which render prayer acceptable ; but from a vain desire to appear holier than other men, and to obtain a reputation for sanctity and devotion.

Now, though such a motive for prayer must render it not only a vain but an offensive service, and no reward could follow piety that was merely assumed and pretended ; undoubtedly there is, as Christ here shews, a service which man can offer to His God, that will obtain acceptance and reward. And such a service is prayer, when it is sincere and from the heart. When conscious that we are sinners, we retire into our secret chambers to confess before God our unworthiness, and as men self-condemned, to throw ourselves upon His mercy and implore His forgiveness ; prayer, offered

with such a disposition of mind, will be heard, and the pardon which we desire will, according to our Saviour's promise, be granted. Again, when looking into the strict rule of the Gospel, we compare with it our own characters and tempers, and perceive in how many Christian graces we are defective, how little of the love of man, and still less of the love of God we have yet attained; when thus affected, we implore the Giver of all good gifts, to supply by His own Holy Spirit our various deficiencies; such prayer will be accepted, and the grace we need obtained. Or when the dangers of life fill us with apprehension, when troubles and difficulties harass us, and sorrow and affliction bow our spirit to the ground; if then we cry to Him, who can preserve us safe in the midst of perils, can remove all the hindrances to our happiness, and support us under the heaviest burdens, we shall not call upon Him in vain. Harkening to our supplication, He will save and defend, bless and console us. And when upon any particular occasion, with full confidence in His goodness, we open to Him the desire of our hearts, and beseech Him to grant us the peculiar object of our wishes, He will assuredly bestow it, if it be really good for us, and consistent with our Christian hopes.

Such are the effects which the promises of Scripture lead us to expect from prayer, and the words of Christ here encourage these expectations. For He assures us that "our Father who seeth in secret will reward us openly," and the most obvious reward of prayer, is the

grant of that for which we pray. At the same time, much more than this is conveyed in His words: for as He opposes to the prayers of hypocrites the prayers of the faithful, and as the object of the first is to be seen of men, of the others to be seen of God, so He asserts that their rewards will be as different as their motives. The pretended piety of the first will gain nothing but worldly praise. The real unaffected piety of the others will be recompensed in heaven: for it is there only that the rewards of God can be said to be conferred openly.

Christ adds: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him?"

It is not the object of Christians, when they pray, to offer a mere lip-service, to repeat certain words as a form before God; much less to inform Him of their wants, as if He did not know them. Our prayers should express that we rely upon Him to supply the wants we feel, that we come to Him both from a sense of our own necessities, and from a belief in His goodness. Then, the sentiments being right, the words are not so material. But the best words we can use, our Lord here supplies, in the form which from Him is called the Lord's Prayer:—"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day

our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

From this prayer we learn both in what manner and for what things we should pray^a, and it teaches us how much more we should consider the next world than the present, when we offer our devotions to heaven. For first we pray that "His Name may be hallowed," that is, that the glory of God may be advanced, and His Name adored by all His creatures: that His "kingdom may come," a kingdom of peace and truth and righteousness below, and of everlasting happiness above: that obedience to His will may be rendered by us men as promptly as by angels. Then we desire that He would from day to day supply our wants, and pardon our continual misdoings, as we are ready to forgive the offences of our brethren. For since we owe obedience to God, sins which are failures in duty to Him are called "debts." We further pray, that amidst the temptations of the world He would preserve us from falling, and defend us from all dangers both of body and soul, and especially deliver us from the power of the evil spirit. These are petitions which, if they are heard, our salvation is secure. And as we thus pray in the Lord's Prayer, these are the sort of things which should be the objects of our other prayers. At the end of this prayer our Saviour adds, what He so

^a The best exposition of the Lord's Prayer is to be found in the Church Catechism: "I desire my Lord God," &c.

often enforces: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." We must never forget, therefore, when we pray for pardon, the thing most needful for us all, that we can only obtain it on condition of our forgiving others.

Our Saviour next condemns the hypocrisy of those Jews who, in the fasts observed in their religion, affected great appearance of austerity from the unworthy motive of being observed by men, and obtaining their praise: "Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

Though fasting is not perhaps an essential duty of the Christian religion—certainly not as essential as almsgiving and prayer, which can never be dispensed with in any Christian—our Saviour did not encourage His disciples to leave off fasting, which, among a people who were superstitiously addicted to it, might have brought upon them the imputation of irreligion^b; yet He wishes this also to be performed with the same

^b "These fasts, it seems, were self-imposed: for there was only one fast in the whole year of divine appointment."—Michaelis, quoted by Bishop Middleton.

view of pleasing God. No outward austerities were to be affected: their usual customs of "anointing their head and washing their face" were not to be omitted. If they were seriously humbled for their sins, and really desirous of mortifying their lusts and appetites (which is what fasting expresses and is intended to promote), this would be seen of God in secret acts of self-denial, and they would want no human spectator of such humiliation. It would have respect to His observation alone.

As fasting does not seem enjoined by the Apostles when writing to the Gentiles, it may perhaps be concluded that, as a Jewish ordinance, it is not so far obligatory upon Christians, that to omit it is sin. Yet the spirit of it should not be forgotten. If not necessary, it may be useful on proper occasions to retire from the world, and break off our usual indulgences, and to spend in acts of devotion and penitence as much of our time as can be spared from the business of life, and this with a view to the approbation of God only. For though He cannot be pleased with the mere act of abstaining from food, He will approve and reward us when He sees in our hearts a desire to humble ourselves under a sense of sin, and by withdrawing from the world for a season, and by religious exercises, to express our devotion to Him, and our recollection of those vows by which we are bound to "crucify the world with its affections and lusts."

The sum of all is this: there are actions good in themselves, and as such acceptable to God, which lose

their reward from Him when performed with an improper motive, such as the desire of appearing, rather than of being, good. Hypocrisy and ostentation are odious in the sight of men, who yet are often imposed upon by them. How deeply offensive must they be to God, whom they cannot deceive. May divine grace preserve us from these offences, and if we can resolve to perform acts of charity, piety, and self-denial; may we be excited to them by proper motives, the desire of pleasing God, and the humble hope of being rewarded by Him. If His Holy Spirit has inclined our hearts to the performance of these duties, we may consider with comfort and satisfaction that we have a Father who seeth in secret, and that with Him no well-intended act will be overlooked. Our closet prayers, our unostentatious charities, our secret mortification of our unruly and inordinate desires, all our efforts at improvement, all our struggles to correct every wrong disposition, are marked by Him, "who seeth in secret and will reward us openly."

HOMILY VI.

ST. MATTHEW vi. 19—21.

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal :

“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal :

“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

THE object of these precepts of Christ is the same which prevails through the whole of this divine sermon. It is to shew how much the concerns of the life to come are superior to those of the present: how much more important it is to man to have secured a reversion of happiness beyond the grave, than to have amassed all the treasures which this world can bestow. And who that believes at all in a future state will not acknowledge the truth of these words? For when all has been done towards the attainment of wealth that human schemes attended with the most complete success can effect, what comparison will the utmost amount of it bear to the possession of treasure in heaven? Are we not certain soon to leave the one and to go to the other? to lose all interest and property in the former, and to be admitted to the perpetual enjoyment of the latter? Such would be

the fact, if our worldly substance were certain to endure to the end of our lives, and the folly of preferring earthly to heavenly treasure must still be confessed.

But our Lord urges another consideration, which is the uncertainty of earthly possessions. They are in their own nature perishable, they are liable to be consumed, and amidst the changes and chances of life, and the wrong and robbery so common among men, we are ever exposed to the danger of being deprived of them. It is true that "the moth and rust" are not now the instruments by which our riches are consumed, which was the case, when changes of garment were a great part of wealth, and when the precious metals were kept in the hands of their owners. The different way in which property is now possessed and secured may render it more safe and permanent. Yet still we see so much of the changes and chances of human condition, we hear so much of broken fortunes and ruinous speculations, of rapid descents from affluence to poverty, that we cannot deny to riches the quality which Solomon of old ascribed to them, that "they make to themselves wings, and fly away."

And if we grant, as perhaps we may, that the condition of the rich in the present state of things is raised, if they have common prudence, above the probability of change, yet even to them—considering the short duration of life—the "end of all things is at hand." And further, it is certain that our Saviour is not addressing Himself only to the rich, but to all who have any possessions, or can acquire them by their in-

dustry. None are so poor that they may not find a lesson in this precept, and it is their happiness that they may, for if they have little or no earthly treasure, they are the more concerned to "lay up treasure in heaven." Nay, who are so much tempted as the poor to dishonesty, and theft, and imposing upon others; that is, to those methods by which they may better their condition here at the expense of happiness hereafter? It is, my poor brethren, when your wants and necessities are most urgent; when, having nothing of your own, you are tempted to make free with the property of your neighbour, it is then the time to consider for how small and pitiful a consideration you are endangering the treasure laid up for you in heaven. For to you especially is that treasure promised. "Blessed are ye poor," for you peculiarly have the Gospel preached unto you, for "yours is the kingdom of God." And be assured for your comfort that however humble is your situation, if its hardships never tempt you to swerve from honesty, if you take no means but such as God approves to obtain the supply of your wants, if you prefer the reward of uprightness in another life to all that you can gain wrongfully below, you will be deemed to have kept this precept of your Lord in as true a sense as he who has resisted the strongest temptation to become rich when riches were to be obtained by the sacrifice of integrity.

Nor is it to be denied that our Saviour speaks here not positively but comparatively, not as if He forbade us to lay up a store for a day of distress or necessity, for a time when we can no longer labour, to make pro-

vision for our children, or for those near friends who have a fair claim upon us. Prudence has ever been considered a virtue, and these are its dictates, as indeed they are the dictates of reason and duty. But if we seek those things more than the favour of God and the rewards of eternity; if, as men are so apt to do, we let our worldly callings engross our whole minds, so that religion becomes a secondary consideration, or perhaps not a consideration at all; if, in cases where we may promote our worldly interest by disobeying God, we do not forego that advantage; if, to provide for ourselves or our families, we are engaged, or we engage them, in an unlawful calling or an irreligious course of life, we lay up "treasure on earth" at the expense of "treasure in heaven." And the same must be said when we give up so much of our time to the pursuit of gain and of present advantage, as to leave no leisure for thinking about religion, for examining its truth, for reflecting upon its importance, for performing its proper exercises, and attending its ordinances of prayer, the Scriptures, public worship, and the Lord's Supper. These ordinances, it is to be feared, are very generally neglected by men who are most eager in their worldly business; and when such is the case, who sees not where their heart is? Our Lord, indeed, leaves us in no doubt: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Whilst the Christian, in every scheme that he proposes, considers whether it is agreeable to the law of God; whether it is likely to have a good moral effect

upon him; whether it will not interfere with his religious duties; whether, in a word, it is consistent with his hopes of heaven: the worldly man, in the duties of religion itself, is apt to ask whether they will not take up time that, according to his view, would be more advantageously employed; whether, if this or that precept were obeyed, it would not be a diminution of his profits; whether seasons of sacred rest and stated times for devotion, self-examination, and meditation, can be observed by one who has the business of this world to engross his attention. And is it not proved by this test that the treasure of the one and the heart of the one are in heaven; and that the treasure and the heart of the other are upon earth?

It is sometimes observed by those who are no friends to the strict practice of religion themselves, when they would reflect upon the more pious, that godly men are by no means so indifferent to the riches and the good things of this life as their profession would lead men to expect. But we may answer that, according to our belief, Christ has not forbidden us absolutely the pursuit nor the possession of wealth, nor the enjoyment of worldly comforts. We have the words of an Apostle to assure us that "godliness hath promise of this life as well as of that which is to come." We are enjoined in Scripture to exert all the talents which God has entrusted to us; we are commanded to be sober and temperate, punctual and faithful in all our dealings, "not to be slothful in business" whilst "serving the Lord." Now who does not see that this is the direct

way to worldly prosperity? for though wealth, sought for its own sake, does not help a man in his way to heaven; yet in the pursuit of heaven, wealth and present comforts are often to be obtained. The ancient proverb says truly, "Thefts never enrich, alms never impoverish, prayer hinders no work." It is further to be observed that wealth, honestly acquired or rightfully possessed, is sanctified by its use. The Word of God does undoubtedly require that we be liberal in the distribution of it, that we love it not for its own sake, but receive it with thankfulness as the good gift of God; that we save it only because we foresee a time when we or those who belong to us will have need of it; and that we do not carry saving so far as to forget the claims of the poor and needy. We cannot more effectually lay up "treasure in heaven" than by employing in good and charitable uses our "treasure upon earth." This is "making to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness."

In connection with this argument, our Lord next observes: "The light of the body is the eye^a: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light^b. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness."

What can we understand by these words? A comparison is implied in them between the light of the body and the light of the mind. The light of the mind

^a "What the mind is to the soul, that the eye is to the body."—*Philo.*

^b "The internal spiritual eye, the understanding, the power to comprehend that which is divine."—*Olehaugen.*

is its judgment of things. And where that judgment is blinded, or a false view of things is taken, the whole conduct of a man will be involved in error and folly. All his actions will be directed to no good, or to a bad end, as certainly as the steps will be false, and we shall wander out of the way, when we cannot see our path. For instance, in this important matter of choosing between earthly and heavenly treasure, "if our eye be single," that is, if we have a right judgment of things, we shall prefer the real and permanent happiness that is promised in a future state, to the uncertain profits and transient pleasures of this world. Then 'our whole body will be full of light;' our whole plan of life will be regulated by reason and religion; our way will be clear before us; and having one right object, we shall preserve that course which leads directly to it.

But "if our eye be evil;" if we lose sight of futurity; if, as St. Peter expresses it, we are "blind, and cannot see afar off," having no apprehension of those distant and eternal blessings which might be ours hereafter; if our judgment is so perverted that we prefer earth to heaven, "the light that is in us is darkness," and according to the false views that we take will be the folly and wickedness of our conduct. Having "through the blindness of our heart" lost the hope of heaven, we shall neglect the course that leads to it. Of such a state our Lord might well say, "How great is that darkness." May we, my Christian brethren, be preserved from it. "The eyes of our understanding being

enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of our calling," that there are promised to us Christian joys eternal and inconceivable, a substantial good that will infinitely overpay all the struggles and sacrifices that we may be called upon to make in this life in order to attain it. The grand thing here impressed is, that having by a deliberate judgment convinced ourselves that it is more important to be happy in the next life than to be rich and prosperous in this, we should choose the one before the other, and act consistently with that choice. For one must have the preference above the other; since, as Christ next pronounces, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

There are two objects of pursuit, heavenly and earthly happiness: these are essentially different in their natures. The one respects God and a life to come, the other the favour of men and the life that now is. If God is our Master and heaven our object; it will be necessary to be not only sober and honest, but chaste, meek, humble, charitable, forgiving, and devout, serious and self-denying. Thus the divine Master is served. But if it is our object to stand well with the world; common honesty, and what it is the fashion to call honour, may perhaps be necessary; but to deny ourselves, and to mortify our lusts and passions will not be required. We may be proud, selfish, and voluptuous, and without scruple practise those arts by which we may profit ourselves. "If thou doest well unto

thyself, men will speak well of thee." This is all that mammon exacts. Then his, you will say, is the easier service. If all ended here, at least, you would think it must be so. And yet it is found that the passions which the love of the world inflames, and which religion would subdue,—the envy, the jealousy, the pride, the ambition, the discontent that tear and torture the worldly mind,—are as little consistent with present happiness as they are reconcilable with the hope of future glory. And since it is evident that we cannot serve both God and mammon, which are so essentially different both in what they promise to their servants and in what they require of them; and since it is plainly our highest interest to serve God, Christ requires us at once to renounce the service of mammon in these strong expressions: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

As the generality of men have need of a calling in which they may exercise the powers of body and mind which they have received from God, it must be agreeable to the divine will that they should in this way make provision for their wants and gain a livelihood; and this they neither could nor would do if they were careless and unconcerned about every thing that relates to the present life. Such a degree of thoughtlessness is not what our Lord enjoins. "Our Lord's precepts," says a sensible commentator on this passage, "are, in

the Oriental manner, concisely and proverbially expressed, and we acknowledge that all of them are not to be expounded by the moralist strictly according to the letter^c. Nor, indeed, are the expressions so strong in the original as in our version. Instead of "take no thought," the words might be rendered, "Be not anxious." What is forbidden is, the being more concerned about our worldly affairs than about our spiritual interests. It is the neglecting of the latter for the former; it is the restless uneasy spirit with which men of business are too often possessed, in opposition to that calm and tranquil state of mind over which religion can exert its influence; it is that presumptuous reliance upon our own endeavours which excludes the consideration, if not the belief, of a Providence; whereas, toil as we will, providence does infinitely more for us than we do for ourselves. It is He who gives us life and health, and strength, and understanding. We dare not call these gifts our own, and yet what could we do without them? It is He who, as Moses said of old, "gives us power to get wealth," as much as He gives to the animals the instincts that lead them to their proper food. This our Saviour finally suggests in the verses that follow: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the

^c Dr. Campbell on Matthew vi. 25.

lilies of the field, how they grow ; they toil not, neither do they spin : and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat ? or, What shall we drink ? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed ? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek :) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things."

I would not weaken the effect of this beautiful passage by commenting upon every separate verse, and indeed it does not require much explanation. It is the whole strain, the concentrated force of it, that should be impressed upon your mind. The sum and substance of it is, that Providence displays Himself in the world by sustaining the inferior animals, for which the grass, the herbs, and wild fruits spring up of their own accord. He shews, by bestowing a garniture upon our fields, that He will not leave His creation bare and destitute ; and can we think a God so wise and good will desert us, whom he has raised so much above them ? Surely we may repose with all confidence in Him, that the life which He has given shall be sustained ; that the "body so fearfully and wonderfully made" shall not want nourishment or clothing ; that all the means of subsistence shall be supplied ; that in His blessing and His care we have an assurance of obtaining all that we need ; that the Christian, like the Psalmist, may

say, "The Lord is my shepherd, therefore shall I lack nothing." "Who is it," asks an ancient writer, "that really lives according to the spirit of the precepts which his Saviour has given him here? He who is confident that, if by infirmity or other cause he is cut off from his work, he shall indeed be fed without his toil, as the birds are, and clothed as the lilies: but with health and strength and opportunity, knows that these are God's appointed means whereby he shall receive things needful for the body, yet esteems not, because he labours, that it is any other than God who does truly feed him, and clothe him now—who knows that it is the anxiety and not the labour (for that is God's appointment) that is excluded, the doubt, whether, if need were, God would provide for us in any other way, that is forbidden with the feeling that it is any other except Him only, who ever under any circumstances, whether we labour or whether we are hindered from labour, does in fact provide^d."

Remember then, good Christians, these consoling words of Christ, and never let the fear of want or distress raise gloomy apprehensions in your minds. Be assured that He will not abandon you, if you abandon not yourselves. Above all, never think that your necessities will plead your excuse for gaining the necessities of life by any dishonest means. If there is a Providence, as you are persuaded there is, He is pledged to support you, and He will do it, either by His blessing upon your honest industry, or when this

^d St. Augustine, quoted by Abp. Trench.

is insufficient, by His free gifts, or by the bounty of others—certainly not by any unrighteous methods. What is so obtained proceeds not from God, nor will His blessing attend it.

And let no one suppose that for the cares of this world he may neglect the concerns of the other. That care is sinful which interferes with these, and is in direct opposition to this entire discourse, of which the whole burthen is, "Think not of earthly things in comparison with heavenly." This is expressed in the following words: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." By this righteousness is meant the higher righteousness which God requires of Christians. Let your first object be the salvation of your soul, and the attainment of those Christian graces which are essential to its salvation. The necessities of life are but secondary to those, and yet shall they not be withholden. "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Be not anxious about the future: even though its prospects be gloomy, trust in Providence. You know not what blessings He may have in store for you. Are you not at this time provided with food, and clothing, and numberless other comforts? Doubt not that God has in His hands the same resources for to-morrow as for to-day.

But whilst these reflections lessen care, let them not slacken industry. To provide for yourselves and your

families is a Christian duty. It is the sentence of Scripture, "He that will not work, neither shall he eat," and "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Therefore do the best you can for yourselves: pray for the blessing of God, and in humble reliance upon it, leave the issue cheerfully and without anxiety to His Providence.

I conclude with the words of St. Paul (which are perhaps the best comment upon this part of our Saviour's discourse): "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have, for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

HOMILY VII.

ST. MATTHEW vii. 1—5.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged.

"For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

"Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

"Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

THE propensity to judge too harshly of the character of others, and too favourably of our own, has at all times been a very common failing, and heathen as well as Christian moralists have agreed in condemning it. Our Lord, with great force and strength of expression, reproves it in this part of His discourse, whilst He suggests the most powerful reasons for abstaining from it: "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

If we consider that we are all of us responsible for our characters and conduct to the judgment of God, and if that judgment, as Christ here declares, will be severe in proportion to the harsh judgment that we pass upon

others, we may well tremble to think what an unmerciful sentence we are treasuring up against ourselves by the uncharitable reflections which we cast upon our neighbours.

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” In censuring the lives and morals of those around us, we do, as it were, set up a severe standard by which we shall be tried ourselves*, and tried by which, we shall in all probability be condemned in God’s righteous judgment.

For though the precise faults which we mark in others are not the same of which we are guilty, (since we are less likely to be severe upon others for those particular failings to which we feel inclined ourselves,) yet that we have other and perhaps greater faults than they, is at least likely. Thus we have set up a standard of goodness, and shall be found ourselves to fall below it. That all sins are equally flagrant is not to be maintained; yet all are so far forbidden, that whoever is properly conscious that he is a sinner, will feel that he is very unfit to be a judge of others. It is true there are open and notorious vices which we cannot but condemn, but then the seat of all sinfulness is the heart; and how many bad qualities, how many wrong dispositions may we discern in ourselves, which shew us to be inwardly as far from perfection, as those whom we censure, in the sight of Him who “requireth truth

* “*Quam temerè in nosmet legem sancimus iniquam.*”—Hor. i. Sat. iii.

in the inward parts." "The mote that is in our brother's eye," the often comparatively small faults which we observe in him, ought not to be remarked by one who has a beam in his own eye,—some malignant temper, some secret appetite, infinitely more foul and more offensive to God than the failings of the other. The bold and gay conversation of thoughtless and unguarded persons, which disgusts the serious, is often denounced by those who are themselves censurable as "whisperers and backbiters," not scrupulous of truth, if not addicted to falsehood. Now the free manner of life, nay, the profligacy and the riotous living of men of the world, are not more contrary to the pure law of Christ than the envy, the pride, the maliciousness, or the covetousness which, lurking in the hearts of stricter professors, often escape their own notice^b.

To correct, then, our own faults is the first thing, and this being done, we shall be disposed to form a fairer judgment of our neighbours. "Thou hypocrite, cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Our Lord, we see, calls the censorious man a hypocrite, a pretender to goodness; for a really good man will have too much charity to be guilty of harsh judging. The grand remedy for this fault is self-knowledge, that divine science which the Pagan declared "descended from heaven," and which is so fully taught

^b "We have the vices of men," said the Cavaliers to the Puritans, "but you have the vices of devils—malice, hypocrisy, and rebellion."

in the Bible. He who has learnt thence to know himself will be severe in judging his own character, candid and charitable in judging that of others.

These precepts seem particularly addressed to the professedly religious, who are apt to err by the harsh judgments which they pass on others, as well as by the fault, or rather the folly, which is reproved in the next verse—that of unseasonably intruding upon persons not fitted to receive them their own pious and well-meant lectures and advice: “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”

These are proverbial expressions. By “dogs and swine” are meant persons who have no relish for goodness, no sense of its beauty and propriety, who are indisposed to religion, worthless, incorrigible characters. To address religion to them is not only idle and injudicious, it has a bad effect upon them; it provokes them to hate and ill-treat those who so unseasonably, as they think, interfere with them. We must consider what sort of effect our serious lessons are likely to produce before we offer them to men in general. There may be those whom it is right to warn and instruct, but they should be such as seem disposed to take our admonition in good part and with docility. “A word spoken in due season is (indeed) good,” but the bad man thinks a good word always unseasonable, and that which is not well-timed is certain not to be well received. It was the wisest of men who said, “To

everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven^e."

Into these digressions our Lord was perhaps led by considering how often men who profess to be religious sin by their uncharitable judgments and harsh speeches, whilst they "trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others;" and how, again, they err by unseasonably and injudiciously offering precepts valuable in themselves, but requiring a fitness of mind to receive them with advantage; and having reproved this sin, and corrected this error, He returns to the main subject of His sermon—the way in which we may advance in our Christian course, our progress from earth to heaven. And here the means of grace are recommended: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Here, unquestionably, prayer is to be understood. It is not necessary to confine it to prayer for spiritual blessings; it is, no doubt, meant generally in the first place. And considering the various wants of men, and how unable the world is to supply them, at least to satisfy their wishes, it is most comfortable to find our Saviour thus encouraging us to believe that if we lay our wants and wishes before our heavenly Father, we shall obtain the things we need, the relief we require: "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

^e Eccles. iii. 1.

We need this assurance, my brethren, for those who form their notions of religion from their own reason rather than from the Scripture are much perplexed with doubts about the efficacy of prayer, and some have the rashness to assert that God will do what He will, and what He sees good for us, whether we ask it or not. This, however, is not the belief of Christians, nor was it the belief of the wiser heathens. Of their service, prayer always formed a part, and they expected that what they prayed for would generally be granted. It certainly seems most worthy of the divine mercy and goodness, and most proper to keep up in ourselves a sense of our dependence upon God, to require us to pray to Him for what we need. And who is most likely to be grateful for the blessings of life? he who receives them as a matter of course, or he who sees in them an answer to his prayers? And though it must be granted that God bestows His common blessings, His sunshine, His rain and His fruitful seasons, on many who, it is to be feared, never implore His gifts; yet it is not easy to say how many things beyond these the religious man procures by supplication and prayer; how many gracious interpositions he experiences; how many evils are averted from him; how many troubles are relieved; how many wants supplied; how many unspeakable consolations ministered to him.

Let us not, therefore, overlook, even in this world's interests, the benefit to be derived from prayer, nor think of confining the care of Providence to things in

general, but believe that our own particular welfare is dependent on His will; and that we shall do well or ill, even here, according as He grants or denies His blessing, since the minutest things belonging to us do not escape the divine knowledge or care: "The very hairs of our head are all numbered." Only we must not too hastily conclude that every particular request will be granted exactly in the way we wish. We are too blind always to know what is good for us; and that which is denied to humble, confiding, persevering prayer, is, for the most part, not granted, because it would not prove a blessing to us.

"Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." These expressions would seem to refer to spiritual blessings, and they are accordingly so applied in the prayers used by the Church in her service at baptism: "Let us that seek find. Open the gate unto us that knock." Now the things which are there desired, and which are of all things the most desirable, are the pardon of our sins and grace to overcome our evil dispositions, and those spiritual endowments by which we are fitted for heaven; for it is vain to suppose that we can go to that holy place, "into which entereth nothing that defileth," if we have not the qualifications, in some degree at least, of those who are the tenants of the blessed mansions, angels and saints, and "the spirits of just men made perfect." But then, how gracious is the assurance here given us that we may obtain these virtues, that we may become what we must all of us, more or less, feel that

we are not, qualified for heaven, made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Well might it be said that to us Christians are given "exceeding great and precious promises;" and as these promises are understood to be the pardon of our sins, grace to reform and make us holy, and lastly eternal happiness, the words might seem to have a reference to these. What, indeed, do we need so much as the pardon of our sins? what should we seek so much as sanctifying grace? for what should we knock so earnestly as for admission into heaven? Christ has used here the most familiar expressions, because the matter concerned the humblest and lowest as well as the highest of mankind, and that none might be discouraged who desired to obtain these gifts, He declares that "every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

We are in our natural state unfit for heaven, and our intercourse with an evil world has made us much more unfit than nature left us; and yet we may attain the necessary fitness, we may become, through the grace which Christ supplies, good and holy men, and "of such is the kingdom of heaven."

"Or what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?" Simple and even homely as these sentences are, there is surely a great beauty in them. How amiable a representation do they give of our heavenly Father, that He is as unlikely, it is as

inconsistent with His nature, to deny to His creatures that call upon Him the things which they need, as it would be unnatural for a human parent to refuse the child who asks him for his food, or to mock his wants by bestowing upon him something that could not satisfy them, or that might be injurious to him. When the fear of want, therefore, harasses Christians, let them be encouraged to lay open their distresses to Him, who, we are assured, pities us, and who has the same disposition to befriend us that we feel towards our own children, and who, besides, has a perfect knowledge of all that we need, and infinite power to bestow it upon us.

“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?” There is nothing more valuable in this discourse of our Saviour than the description which it gives us of the nature of God; for there is nothing more necessary to our happiness, nor more favourable to our religious affections, than to have our minds thoroughly imbued with right notions of God’s disposition towards us. When, therefore, we see how abundant He is in goodness and mercy to us, that the kindest Father is not more careful of the interests of his son, more inclined to supply his wants and grant his reasonable desires, than God is to satisfy those of His human creatures; the ideas this gives of our relation towards Him must command our love, our trust, our resignation to His will, and should make

us ashamed of that forgetfulness of Him which is the reproach of mankind.

We are assured, then, that He will bestow "good things" upon us. But what good things? "All things necessary for life and godliness." No doubt worldly blessings may, in a moderate degree, be desired, and will be granted to our prayers; but as this passage corresponds to one in St. Luke, where, instead of "good things," we read "He shall give His Holy Spirit to them that ask it," it is proper to extend that signification to this verse also, and to understand it as a promise of spiritual influence. To encourage us in working out our salvation, we are elsewhere told that "it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do;" and considering the weakness and corruption of human nature, the example of a wicked world, and the temptations of the evil spirit, as there is nothing we more need than spiritual assistance, so a more gracious promise could not be given. For when we observe how strict the law of God is, how indisposed we feel to obey it, how rebellious are our passions, how perverse our wills, we could not but be uneasy if, in the business of attaining to virtue and holiness, we were left to ourselves. That many are at length left to themselves is to be feared from the unhappy course they take, "continuing in sin," and "working all uncleanness with greediness." But these are men who probably never applied, never, at least, earnestly applied, for divine assistance. But those who, desirous to please God, ask of Him strength and grace to break the bonds of sin, are never aban-

doned; they obtain the aid for which they apply, and in the strength of it are enabled "to perfect holiness in the fear of God." This promised aid, which we have not by nature, but which is given by grace, that is, by the special favour of God, and which is itself often called grace, takes away all excuse from Christians for pleading weakness and inability to do the will of God, because we are not left, unless by our own fault, in that state of weakness of which we complain. There is no limit to the power of the Holy Spirit; whatever be the strength of our passions, whatever be the difficulty of our trials, we can surmount them all, for He proportions His aid to our necessities. Strict, therefore, as the law of God is, and pure and holy as the hearts and lives of Christians are required to be, that law they will be enabled to keep, that purity and holiness they may attain, and, like the Apostle, "can do all things" (that is, all things required of them) "through Christ who strengthens them."

We must here observe that our Lord calls men evil. "If ye, being evil." Thus he admits, he takes for granted, the corruption of human nature, though he determines nothing as to the extent of it, about which men have disputed so hotly and fiercely; and so far from implying that it is irresistible, he assures us of a powerful aid, by which it may be remedied. Then, as if it were a conclusion from this promise that any commandment which He gave us we should be enabled to keep, He adds: "Therefore all things whatsoever

ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets."

This is a simple rule. We have been taught it from our childhood, and it is very properly introduced into our Catechism as the first point in a Christian's duty towards his neighbour. Yet it is, though simple, of the first importance. It was admitted by the heathens to be most just and reasonable, and Christ has given it His sanction, and made it a religious principle—nay, He tells us that all the precepts of the law and the prophets are included in it. It is not, however, of so easy performance as it may at first sight appear. To men in general selfishness is natural, and the world teaches it more or less to all of us, and men are ever justifying each other in selfish maxims, so that it is not without reason that the promise of divine grace goes before a commandment enjoining benevolence to all. For when we are required so to treat others, as we should wish to be treated ourselves, not only bad and malicious actions are of course forbidden, but good, and kind, and charitable deeds positively commanded. Let those who are satisfied with having done no harm remember this, and ask themselves whether they have done any good to others, such as in similar circumstances, they would wish to have been done to themselves?

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait

is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." We cannot have advanced thus far in this divine discourse, without perceiving that the virtues required of Christians are so excellent, the dispositions which they must attain so amiable, the temper of mind so pure and heavenly, that nothing can be less like the ways of the world around us, than the course and character, which as Christians we should be pursuing. To bid us, therefore, pursue that holy path, is to bid us "enter into the strait gate." And if it be true that forgetfulness of God, that pleasing and serving chiefly themselves, that indulging their natural appetites, that cherishing evil tempers and angry passions without any care to reform their lives and change their hearts, that this is the common course that men take, for which they neither blame themselves, nor are reproved by others—is it not evident that to go with the world is not to "enter in at the strait gate," and that the way of the world is "the broad way that leadeth to destruction." For "the end of these things is death."

It is a melancholy thought indeed, yet we cannot but acknowledge the truth of our Saviour's words, that "many there be which go in thereat." When we hear this passage, and consider what men are, and what, according to our Saviour's precepts, they ought to be, it is almost enough to sink us into despair, so difficult, so impossible does it appear to be saved upon these strict conditions! But I correct my words. It is indeed difficult, most difficult, but through divine

grace it is abundantly possible. For we are by no means obliged to fall in with the wickedness which we see around us. We may, if we will, devote ourselves to God through Christ, and resolve to serve Him by a useful, a sober, a righteous, and a godly life. We have, it is true, perverse wills and corrupt hearts; but our Lord has promised to be with us, and in answer to our prayers to afford His divine aid to direct and keep us in the right and the safe way.

But we must not deceive ourselves. If we mean to be Christians, if we desire the rewards promised to them, we must not make the world our standard, we must follow its ways no farther than they are, if not praiseworthy, at least innocent. As far as it is wicked, we have renounced the world. But if we would "enter into the strait gate," if we would pursue the narrow way which so few find, let us remember to what it leads: "It leadeth unto life." It brings us to God by the way of goodness and devotion here, and when we are summoned hence, it will bring us to "the life everlasting" in heaven.

The broad way, on the other hand, which the multitudes are pursuing, can afford us no satisfaction, with all its gains and all its pleasures—unprofitable gains, and pleasures to be repented of; and it leadeth to destruction—destruction both of body and soul. Let us then be warned. Let us no longer neglect the lessons of our Lord. Let us seek His grace to "keep us from the evil world," to enable us to acquire the holy, hea-

venly temper which He enjoins, to practise the divine virtues which He prescribes, to attain the blessings which He promises; that finally, through His favour, we may be admitted into His blessed kingdom "of joy unspeakable and full of glory."

HOMILY VIII.

ST. MATTHEW vii. 15—20.

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

"Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

THAT we cannot trust to the outward appearance of persons or things is a true remark which, we see by the text, holds good in religion also. False prophets will come to us "in sheep's clothing," who "inwardly are ravening wolves." The garb of religion will be assumed by many whose designs are base, unworthy, and wicked. It will necessarily happen that those persons who are earnest in the business of religion, and who regulate their whole lives with a view to its rewards, will appear in the eye of the world with marked, with peculiar, characters. It is not possible

that they whose thoughts are fixed upon a life to come, and who are deeply affected with the importance of eternal life, should take so lively an interest in the passing scenes of this world as those whose hearts it engrosses. Hence, it will happen that there will often be a seriousness and gravity in the appearance of religious persons, an indifference to those gaieties and amusements which belong to what is called a life of pleasure, with a settled aversion to that spirit of revelry and jollity which the world thinks the soul of happiness. And as religious persons will naturally be such as are here described, those who wish to pass for religious will affect this sort of character. Hypocrisy and true religion will therefore outwardly present the same appearance, and we should be in danger of rendering to the hypocrite the homage which is due to the true man, or of denying to the true man his proper homage, because it is often usurped by the hypocrite, had not our Lord apprised us that we might expect to meet in the garb of piety men of the corruptest principles, and given us to understand that we could only "know them by their fruits."

Now, two things are to be learned from our Saviour's words; first, the general caution not to trust altogether to appearance, since a sanctified look might cloke a sensual or a corrupt heart; but secondly, not too hastily to conclude that a grave and serious person was most likely a hypocrite. For, in the first place, a thoughtful and sedate disposition is natural to some; and, secondly, religion has always a tendency to produce

such a frame of mind, whence it has been said by a religious poet,—

“Never man was truly blest
But it composed and gave him such a cast
As folly might mistake for want of joy *.”

We can, therefore, form no judgment either way from the appearance. We must look to the actions, the conduct of these seemingly good professors, before, at least, we become their followers. If we find a great zeal displayed for religion, if it be the topic of conversation on all occasions, the more that is professed, the stricter should be our scrutiny into the real characters of such professors; indeed, they seem to challenge such scrutiny. And if we find, as we sometimes may, that the plainest rules of duty are often violated; that the good actions which religion enjoins are rarely performed; that little of meekness, humility, or charity are apparent in those who assume to be holier than others, it is not their affected sanctity, nor the pretended godliness of their conversation, that should lead us to trust them, much less to choose them for our guides and teachers. We must “beware of such false prophets.”

But when we observe a zeal for God united with charity for man; when we see persons at least as active in the practice of virtue as loud in the condemnation of vice; when the existence of good principles is testified by fruitfulness in good works, then, whether the outward appearance be grave or cheerful, we are

* Young’s “Night Thoughts.”

bound to honour such, as true professors, and to give them credit for being what they appear. Christ, we may believe, had here in view the pretensions of the Pharisees to be holier than the multitude from whom they affected to separate themselves. They were, indeed, to outward appearance holy men, that is to say, they were punctual in the performance of such religious duties as could be publicly performed; but, as their treatment of our blessed Saviour shewed, they had neither the love of truth nor of justice in their hearts. Their dispositions were in a high degree malicious and uncharitable; they were, moreover, proud, vain-glorious, and covetous. And it is possible, in our own days, to be all that they were, and yet to pass with others, and perhaps with ourselves, for good and religious persons. Hence the necessity of our Lord's rule to "try men by their fruits." Kindness of disposition, acts of charity, the regular discharge of social and relative duties, with a steady denial of every evil word and work, are what we should manifest ourselves, and what we are entitled to expect in all Christians who would not pass for mere professors.

We may further infer from these words that where the actions of men are unquestionably good, we ought not to suspect their motives; for, as in the case of wicked actions, we cannot but conclude that he who is guilty of them is a bad man; (for, as it is here said, "a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit;") so, when we see our brethren acting well and morally, we may give them the praise of good men. Christian ingenuity

is never more unprofitably exercised than in finding out bad motives for good actions, yet is this but too common a fault, so prone are men to detract from characters which, they are secretly conscious, are better than their own. But what says our Lord? "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" "Neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." And elsewhere in Scripture we are very expressly told that "he that doeth righteousness is righteous."

But it is not enough to avoid evil actions, positive good must be done. This our Lord very frequently inculcates. Indeed, when we consider the talents, faculties, and opportunities which God has given to man, idleness and unprofitableness are scarcely less to be condemned than actual wickedness. What shall we say, then, to those who are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works," who are charged to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord," if they content themselves with the negative virtue of abstaining from evil, and doing no harm, as the phrase is? Our Lord expresses the doom of such by a strong figure: "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

This is a warning to you, my brethren, not to rest in a religion which only restrains you from doing wrong. You are called upon to do positive good in your generation, and if you neglect it, you will not escape condemnation hereafter. Our Lord represents "the unprofitable servant" as "cast into outer darkness," and the husbandman directs that the barren fig-tree should

be "cut down" as "cumbering the ground." It is not uncommon for persons at the close of life to comfort themselves with the persuasion that they have done no harm to any one, and undoubtedly, as far as it goes, it is a subject of consolation. But it is evidently not enough. It is not the whole duty of a Christian in the business of salvation. Christ everywhere requires us to be active in good works. He bids us "visit the sick," "feed the hungry," "clothe the naked." His example and His precepts alike instruct us to "go about doing good." Religion, too, has its proper business, which cannot be neglected but at the peril of our souls, such as prayer, thanksgiving, public worship, and attendance upon holy ordinances, so that the life of a real Christian is a busy life. Between his duty to God and man he can find no time to be idle, and he would be ashamed to be unprofitable.

But, on the other hand, the offices of religion may be performed and those of morality neglected. This error would ensure our condemnation as certainly as the other; for Christ proceeds to say, "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

It would appear that at first, when the gifts of the

Holy Spirit were attended with the power of working miracles, many possessed and exercised those powers who yet did not bring forth "the fruits of the Spirit," such as charity, meekness, and purity, those moral graces and virtues which were more important to their own salvation. Now it is certain that both our natural talents and our religious endowments are bestowed upon us for the benefit of others as well as of ourselves, and they who possess them are bound, as they are enabled, to edify and profit their fellow men. But besides this, they have a momentous work to perform at home; they have their own hearts to mend, their own consciences to purify, their own salvation to secure. And though they have laboured in the service of religion, have not neglected to call upon God, and have attended regularly upon divine ordinances, or even have ministered in them; yet if withal they have addicted themselves to vices which are an abomination to God; if they have failed and are deficient in those good works, the pure and peaceable virtues of Christianity, despite of the good done by their means to others, despite of their own devotions and sanctimonious observances, they must perish in the sins they have committed. Christ will never acknowledge us as His own till we have renounced all sin and wickedness. To bad men His sentence will ever be, "Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity."

It nearly concerns, then, all who manifest an anxiety for the salvation of others, and, as they profess, labour to promote it, to watch and beware lest they fail to

secure their own, since our efforts in the cause of religion itself can never be admitted as a substitute for strictness of morals and holiness of life in ourselves.

The conclusion of our Lord's discourse shews us how much more anxious He is that His hearers should be good men, than zealous partisans or admirers of His person or His doctrines.

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." These words shew, if anything can, that however important it be in the first place to believe in Christ, and however great an advantage to have the knowledge of His religion, yet faith and knowledge cannot avail without a consistent practice. It is an inestimable blessing, and we cannot prize it too highly, that we are members of the Church of Christ, to which salvation is promised, and in which it may be attained. But after all, it is by obedience to the lessons and laws of Christ that we can make good, as individuals, our title to that salvation. My brethren, mark His words: "He that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them," he only is safe. We have all a solemn trial to undergo. The storms of life will assail us, and the terrors of death threaten to overwhelm our souls, and what will be our security, but that having been instructed by Christ, we have kept His words; that to us He did not preach in vain

when He bade us "seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and withdrew our minds from too anxious a concern about the things of this world; when He bade us repose our care on the goodness of providence and leading a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty, fit and prepare ourselves by acquiring all the qualifications which He prescribes for the happiness that awaits us in the life to come. St. Augustine bids us, "Here note that Christ Himself is the Rock—that man builds on the rock who does the things which he hears and learns of Christ."

The last verses of this discourse are awfully alarming to "all who profess and call themselves Christians," but who are void of real goodness: "And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

Profession without practice can stand us in no stead, can afford us no stay in the shock that awaits our removal from things temporal to things eternal. This is to build upon the sand. But let a right practice accompany a faithful profession, let a Christian temper be united to Christian principles; let obedience, conscientious obedience, prove the sincerity of our adherence to our divine Master, and we may then look forward with hope to that happiness which has been truly said to be "the end of our being," but which

"this world cannot give:" it is only to be found certainly in that better world, which Christ has revealed.

Thus ends the divine discourse of our Saviour upon the Mount, which promises such blessings, and contains such instructions, as none but a Teacher commissioned from heaven could offer to mankind. Here is the favour of God, peace of mind and conscience, the supply of all our wants, nay, the fulfilment of all our reasonable desires, even in the present life, graciously assured to us. Here are pointed out all the duties required of us, all the qualities which we should attain in order to please God and be rewarded by Him. Here is the offer of divine assistance to enable us to fulfil those duties, and to inspire us with all these qualifications for heaven. Here finally is the glorious assurance of eternal happiness to every one who seeks it, by "a patient continuance in well-doing."

But it must strike every understanding hearer of this exquisite sermon of our Lord, how very different a practice it requires from that with which men ordinarily satisfy themselves, what superior characters they must be who can take comfort from its promises. It is related of an eminent man^b, who lived in an age when the Scriptures were not generally known as they now are, that being induced to peruse them, observing what sort of characters Christians are there supposed to be, he laid down his Bible and exclaimed, "Either this is not the Gospel or we are not Christians." It is to be feared that too many in the present day, if they would

^b Linacre, Physician to Henry VII. and VIII.

give an attentive hearing to this divine sermon, would come to something like the same conclusion: "If these are the words of Christ, we are not Christians." And a late excellent divine^c says, much to the same effect: "The Sermon on the Mount cannot be read by any thoughtful man without the strongest feelings of shame and humiliation at the contrast between the picture of Christian principles there given, and the actual reality which he sees around him."

But let not this, my brethren, be said of any of us. Let us strive earnestly to be such, as we have seen Christ requires and expects His disciples to be. Let us live up to the knowledge which we have received, to the principles which we profess, and aim at that perfection which human nature, sanctified by the Spirit of God, can yet attain. By the fulness of grace which has been and will be imparted to us; by the all-sufficient strength vouchsafed to our endeavours and our prayers; by the glorious rewards which Christ has set before us; and the privileges which, as members of His Church, we enjoy—let us be encouraged, as we are enabled, to do the will of God, by keeping these commandments of our Lord, and seeking above all things the "kingdom of God and His righteousness."

^c Dr. Arnold.

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